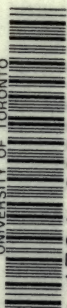


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(THE SECOND MAGIC TALE)

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III

THE ROMANCE OF PALOMBRIS AND PALLOGRIS

(THE SECOND MAGIC TALE)

BY

G. P. BAKER

AUTHOR OF "THE MAGIC TALE OF
HARVANGER AND YOLANDE"

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CONTENTS

BOOK I

PALOMBRIS	.	.	.	.	.	PAGE 1
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	-----------

BOOK II

HERON	.	.	.	.	.	85
-------	---	---	---	---	---	----

BOOK III

THE BLUE BULL	.	.	.	.	.	173
---------------	---	---	---	---	---	-----

BOOK IV

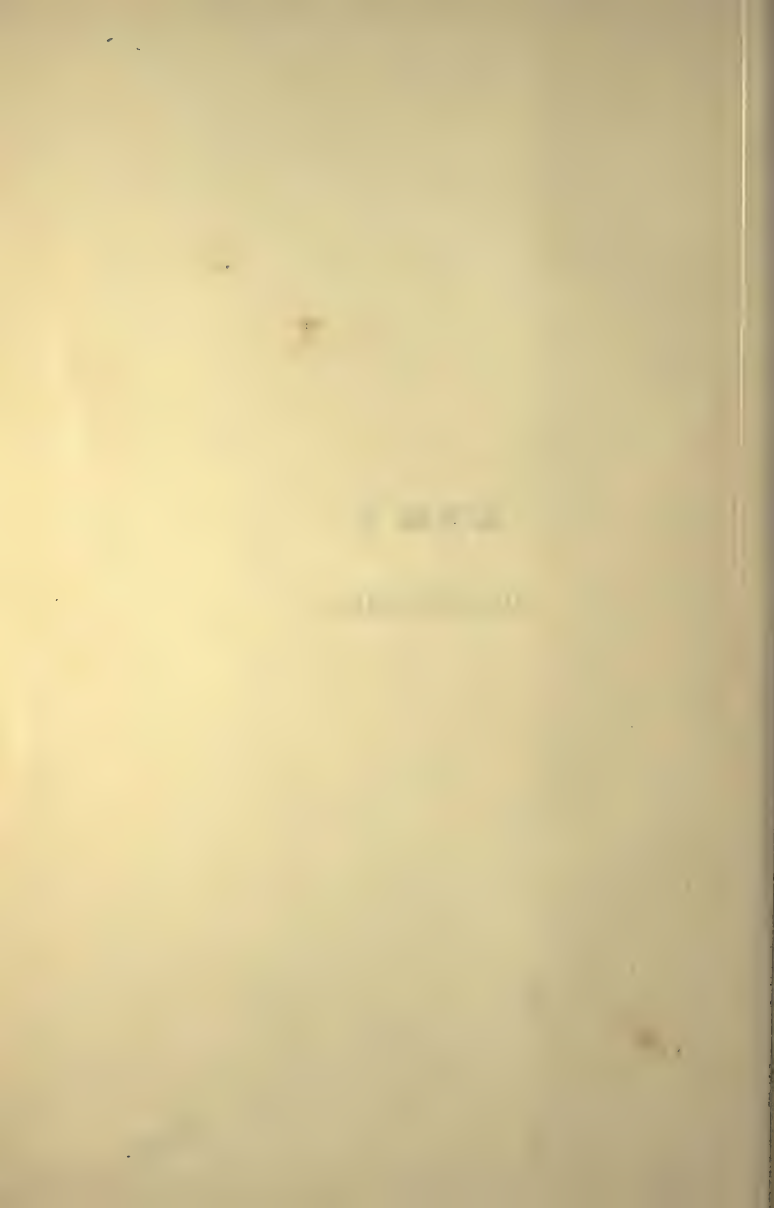
VIANE	.	.	.	.	.	283
-------	---	---	---	---	---	-----

BOOK V

PALLOGRIS	.	.	.	.	.	349
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	-----

BOOK I.

PALOMBRIS.



CHAPTER I. OF THE PARTING OF PALOMBRIS AND PALLOGRIS

No man knew where Greenwood began or ended ; and of those who dwelt therein few were of one mind as to what lay beyond it, albeit all were agreed that it was a mighty great wood, and had an end, if one journeyed far enough. There was a place called Isle-Kol. It lay in the depths of Greenwood, and the thick wood ran all around it, where in the midst rose up a hill, on which were some long acre-strips of tillage, and two or three little orchard-closes. In all ways it was a quiet land, and the sun was warm, and the folk peaceful ; and whoso looked upon it might well have thought that nothing had ever happened there since the beginning of the world, save birth and death, and the turn of the seasons, and the growing of corn and fruit, and the dreams of home-loving men.

But in Isle-Kol lay a tower, not great, but rather small. Half of it lay in ruins clad with ivy ; yet the ivy was young, and if any man had come to pass by he would have seen great ravining breaches, and stone-work still black with ancient smoke, and charred beams, where once the war-engines had played upon a strong castle, and where the flames had devoured. Those who were old had memory

of the fierce heathen who had wrought that wrack, and could call to mind the glory of that castle before it was destroyed ; for great men had dwelt there, although it seemed little likely that any such would ever dwell there again.

But when this tale begins, there dwelt an old lord in the tower ; his name is not written, but he was an old man, white-bearded, tall, and so straight that no lance could be straighter. A proud man he was, too, and much given to thinking over old times and long past days. He had a little grandson, whose name was Palombris.

Palombris had no father or mother, nor remembrance of any ; but he had a nurse for foster-mother, a strong handsome quean of the wood-people. He grew up in the wood like Percevale in the ancient stories, knowing nought of the world beyond. He was small, yet strong for his age, and round of face and dark of hair, and a dreamer of dreams, as was like to be : for what he did not know he filled up to his own content out of thoughts and fancies, and things gathered from ballads and stories, which he pieced together in his mind.

Palombris knew the wood as though it were a book, with the apple-blossom and honeysuckle for its floriation, and the sun and clouds for its pictures, and the birds and beasts for the folk whose tale was told in it. An exceeding glorious book it was ; but as for the tale it told, no one knew that save himself, and he knew it so well, and pondered over it so deeply, that he thought every one else knew it

likewise, so it remained a secret,—unless Pallogris had learnt somewhat thereof from him. In winter he never stopped going abroad, for he was hardy enough ; but most of all he loved the sweet spring of the year, when all things budded and blossomed apace, for this was dearest to his heart. Then he had his woodland haunts, where he could go and stay for a whole week on end if he wished ; for his grandsire never asked after him, but was content to see him now and again, as chance offered, so that he could do all things at his own will, without let or hindrance.

A most busy person was Palombris, ever full of endless devisings. He built castles in the wood, and lived in them ; he made bridges over the brooks, and houses high up in trees, and there was never a day but he was deep in some device which he had invented. There was an old carle, the husband of his nurse, who taught Palombris to use weapons. No man could say whether he taught him well or ill, because no man lived near to say. And in this manner Palombris grew up, listening, thinking, contriving ; and it was the great mark of him that he laid hold of all scattered and diverse things, and changed them into reason and order.

Then there was Pallogris, who helped him in all these matters, and was his playmate. Pallogris dwelt in the tower also, and was another foster-child of the old nurse ; but who her father and mother might be, Palombris did not think of asking. Ever since they were very small, they

had used to play at children's games together, until they grew big, and then they played other games. Palombris carved dolls for Pallogris, and devised carts for them to ride in ; and afterwards, when he built castles, and established a realm in the wood, she was his queen. She deemed him the most wondrous person, and followed him whithersoever he would go, and they knew one another's hearts, and told one another all that was in their minds. So the time fared on until Palombris was sixteen, and Pallogris well-nigh of like age ; but to any one who had seen them, they would not have seemed so old.

On a day, Palombris' grandsire sent for him, which of itself would well have been a strange thing, and long to be remembered. The old man was sitting in his chair when Palombris came. He said nought for a while, but presently raised his eyes and spoke.

"Grandson," said he, "I deem that I am not like to be here over-long now. Therefore take thy father's sword (for that is a good custom of men, that a son should have the sword of his father), and go through the wood northward to the hills. Thence go through the Debateable Wood to Barbizen, and ask after the king of that land, and present the sword to him. After which, take whatsoever shall befall you. I can guess somewhat," said he, "of what shall come to pass, but it is best to say little, for the least said is soonest mended."

"When shall I return ?" asked Palombris.

“We shall see,” answered the old man; “for there may be a change of times before thou comest back. Nor is this in any wise out of the way, since it is seldom that a man goes on a far journey, and returneth home to find all things as before, least of all himself. Although thou knowest no more than the domain of Isle-Kol, I know all that lies beyond it, and I bid thee go on this journey.”

“I will follow thy bidding faithfully,” said Palombris.

“And I shall not tell thee aught, nor lay aught upon thee, more than this that I have said,” quoth the old lord; “since I am minded to think that thou wilt do best alone. Few counsels are better than many, if they be wise; and there are times when the best counsel is none at all.”

“I will trust in thy judgment,” answered Palombris.

The old man said again: “As to thyself, I say nought. Thou hast had the best up-bringing a gentleman can have, namely, none to speak of, but a kind nurse, a playmate, and much freedom. Hold fast to the ways thou hast learnt, and thou wilt do well. Fear no man, be slow of judgment, and faithful to all oaths and promises.”

Palombris thanked him.

Thereupon the old man took up a sword that lay against his chair, and gave it to Palombris. It was somewhat long, whereas Palombris was a small youth, but it was well and plainly made, and for the rest in no wise notable. The cross-

guard was of polished steel, and the grip was wound with golden wire, and the scabbard and belting were of blue leather.

“Perchance thou wilt see fairer swords than this,” quoth the old lord ; “but this is one which thou wilt grow to love and to value high, so that it will be a mighty wrench ever to part with it.”

So Palombris took the sword, and the same evening he fared away on foot through the wood. Pallogris came with him a good way ; sadness and hope were in their hearts. Then when they were in a spot where a wood-lake was, they parted.

Pallogris said wistfully : “It is a far journey thou goest, playmate ; and what shall I do until the days be over ? ”

He answered : “It will be as long for me as for thee, playmate. Yet be of good cheer, for I shall most surely return, and if things prove as I have thought and dreamed, I will come back, and we will live for ever in Barbizen.”

“I hope it will be so,” said she. “But it will be dull for me to wait and wonder what deeds thou art doing, and to go along all the places where we have been wont to meet and go together, and thou no longer there.”

They thought over this a while. Then he kissed her ; for when it came near, their parting seemed suddenly a much harder matter than while it was only talked of. “I know not what deeds I shall do,” said Palombris, “nor whether I may send word thereof, but if I can do that, I will do it most

gladly. In Barbizen, playmate, will we live at last, if all goeth well ; for I shall not live happily in any place without thee."

She said : " Thou wilt not forget me ? I shall not forget thee, but I shall fear lest thou forgettest me, not of thy default, but because thou mayst meet others far better than I. But I have no other playmate, and desire none."

" I will not forget," he said, " either on one count or the other." So they sat together on a bank, and kissed and comforted one another a little ; and then Palombris strode on manfully through the wood, with his sword belted round him, and a staff in his hand, and at his back a wallet, in which Pallogris had deftly put many things.

It was the season of Spring, and the sun was already growing warm, and the buds were opening to blossom. Pallogris stood beside a tall tree, and watched Palombris growing smaller and further away, till he had quite gone, and was no more to be seen. Then she turned to go back, feeling strange and lonely, as she had never felt before in her whole life ; yet even amidst that loneliness her heart rose within her and trembled for joy, for it seemed to her that wonderful things and fair would come to pass, and days be no longer all alike. And if it were long to wait, that might be by reason that so much time was needed, wherein to make herself ready for Palombris' return.

So she passed back over the grass, that seemed to open many flowers around her feet, which she

had not seen before ; and she thought that the hours might pass the more happily, and all things be better, because she would be making herself ready for the day when Palombris returned.

Palombris fared on through Greenwood, and half his mind was with the playmate and the dear people he had left, and half was with the strange unknown people to whom he was going. He saw no houses in the wood, nor any folk about, but only the dim shadowy arcades of trees, dark and mysterious, and the flourishing underbrake with its young leaves of springtime. But there was an old path, nearly overgrown with grass and weeds, as if few men used it, and along this he kept, for it was his way. When the dark came, he ate some of the food in his wallet, and slept under a tree on old dry bracken : and he awoke again to find the sun shining brightly among the tree tops, and himself alone, and on the way to Barbizen. He sprang up, and so fared on again all day, thinking ever on those he left and those he went to, and stopping only to eat. But when he had journeyed in this manner through the wood all the day, never leaving the path, he came to a place where he had not been before : and here all was strange to him. And at sunset he saw before him a small path that left the ancient road, and ran into the wood on the right hand ; it seemed a path used by men, for it was well worn, and he turned into it therewith, and followed it a while, deeming that even if it led nowhither, yet he might presently find a place to sleep in better than by the side of

the road, good as that was. The dusk fell somewhat faster than he had looked for, so when it was well-nigh quite dark, he thought he would go no further, but would there gather bracken for a bed. Even as he came to this mind, he had sight of what seemed to be a light in the wood, as of a lamp shining through the darkness. So he went on again, and still the light shone before him, and seemed verily to be of a lamp ; and he came by dark ways along a path towards a house or stead. What was around it he could not see, although this he knew, that there was more sky overhead, heavy with stars and swift clouds. There was a gate in a garth hedge, and he opened it ; and then he came to a house that stood large and looming before him, and a door was in the house, and at the door he knocked.

Then came footsteps from within, and the door was opened to him, and a voice bade him enter.

CHAPTER II. OF THE JOURNEY OF PALOMBRIS THROUGH THE WOOD : AND OF HALTS BY THE WAY

Now when Palombris passed the threshold, and stepped into that house, he found that he was in a hall, not high, but broad and low, and heavily timbered with beams of oak. A mighty great hearth was in one side, wherein was a fire, and many things were in that room. Huge dishes stood on a shelf over the hearth, and a cauldron hung by a chain from a brass jack ; and before the

fire was a table, on which stood candles, and great dishes all covered over with covers ; and round about were great settles, wherein men might sit and be warm in winter weather. At the table sat a large man with black hair and a thick heavy jowl ; a right stout man, yet something scowling of aspect, as if given to grumbling and fault-finding. But by the fire was his wife, and a maid closed the door again after Palombris.

Then said the man : “ So thou art come to Hawk at Sun-Isle, young lord ? What wilt thou ? ”

“ Guesting for the night,” answered Palombris.

“ Thou art welcome to it,” quoth Hawk. “ Here we are, at point of taking the covers from our dishes. Sit ye down with us, if so it be that ye do not disdain to eat with poor folk.”

“ I thank you,” said Palombris ; and he sat down at the table, while Hawk lifted the covers from the dishes, and showed what was therein. Hawk seemed not so well pleased as might have been expected, for he shook his head doubtfully as he took off each cover. Then he poured out ale from a tall jug, and handed a cup to each of those at the table. Last of all, he ladled out into bowls a stew of mutton from one dish, and put into each a large piece of rye-bread.

“ Humble fare,” said he, “ but such as it is, thou art welcome to it.”

Now Palombris had never before seen so much food and so good on one table, nor a house so well-beseen and furnished as was this ; so he answered :

“This is far better than I am used to, and I see that I shall be well guested, Master Hawk.”

Hawk was a valiant trencher-man, and had already got half-way through his bowl while Palombris was finding a spoon, and speaking these words. He made answer:

“This thou sayest of courtesy. I am a poor man, and I account this fare but rough: the more so that I perceive ye linger over it somewhat.”

“That is because I eat little,” said Palombris.

Hawk did not seem to believe this, any more than the other. The meal went on; Palombris, ate as much and as fast as he could, lest he should seem to despise Hawk’s welcome, and this came the more easily because he was hungry, albeit on most days it was true that he ate little. But Hawk ate more than Palombris had ever thought a man could eat; he ladled out one dish after another, and served out great pieces of pudding, and poured out ale freely, till Palombris thought there would be no end to it; and all this while he grumbled, and seemed ill content at the smallness and poor-ness of his table.

In a marvellously short time they had cleared the table of most that was upon it, and then Hawk drew to the fire, and set Palombris in a place of honour, close to the coals. Palombris found it mightily warm there, but said nothing, lest he should seem discourteous; for he thought that Hawk would never believe that he was used to smaller fires than this. As for Hawk, he loved the warmth, and the hotter the fire was, the better he liked it.

Said Hawk : " Whither away, young lord ? "

Palombris answered : " I am going to Barbizen."

Hawk shook his head, as one not over sure as to whether things will go ill or well.

" A long journey and a perilous," said he.

" The road to Barbizen is not the only one that is long and hard," answered Palombris.

" Yea," quoth Hawk, " but that in no way diminisheth its peril. Luck will be with thee if thou gettest thither safely. Better it would be to bide at home."

Palombris stared at him in surprise, not knowing what to make of this.

" If thou comest to that," he said, " it were better still to have stayed unborn."

Hawk seemed somewhat vexed, and his words grew even more gloomy than before.

" 'Tis an ill deed," said he, " to send thee forth in this manner alone into the great world, wherein is much force and violence ; and thou moneyless and unarmed to boot. Otherwise should I have counselled, had my counsel been asked. And I am not sure that thou art fit to face all the evil of the world, whereas thou hast had a soft and peaceful time so far, and been but little tested. I fear me thou wilt not be able to win thy way in the face of harder men."

" It can do no harm to try," said Palombris.

But Hawk still shook his head, and would see no good before him.

" Such trials as ye speak of," he said, " cannot be revoked ; and therein is the harm of them.

Many a man hath come to ill ending, and never been able to profit by wisdom too late learnt."

"None the less," quoth Palombris, tranquilly, "I shall go on."

"It is easy to say that," answered Hawk. "Thou knowest not what perils lie before thee; great and deadly are they, and such as thou canst not deal with. Thou art gentle and unwitting of all evil, yea, even as a child. Thou wilt come into great danger, as I deem."

Palombris said that he would take that risk. Then they fell to speaking of the road, and Hawk told him that a day's journey on through the wood there was a place called Wood-Isle, where he might well have guesting for a night. A man named Heron dwelt there; but when Palombris asked what manner of man he might be, Hawk would not say much.

"Only this I will tell thee," said he, "that thou wilt need in some ways to beware of Heron, for he is untrustworthy."

Palombris asked how that came about.

"Why," quoth Hawk, "he is one of those men who will not be fended off from seeing good in everything. Yea, if his house were burnt, Heron would deem that some luck lay behind it, and if a thunderbolt slew all his sheep, Heron would be sure to maintain that we might all be thankful that it had fallen out so. For my part, I would not encourage Providence to deal worse with me than it does."

"Then thou lookest for little fortune in the

world ? ” asked Palombris. “ I should have deemed thee well off.”

Hawk shook his head diverse ways, and would not grant that.

“ Ye great lords and rich men,” he said, “ are too apt to think the poor well off. But we live harder than you do, and have little to return thanks for.”

Palombris said no more ; but he was puzzled, for it did not seem as Hawk said.

Then the next morning, ere the sun was up, Hawk roused him, and set him on his way ; for he said that it was a good day’s journey to Wood-Isle, and it were well not to tarry by the way. So he showed Palombris the path to the road, lighting him with an horn lantern, and Palombris did not see Sun-Isle save by night-tide.

It fell out even as Hawk had said, and it was dusk or ever Palombris came to the by-path that led aside to the house of Heron of Wood-Isle. But he followed it, till he came upon a broad open space, and saw a hill before him, and on the crest of the hill a light. He deemed at first that he had come to the edges of the wood ; withal, he found presently that he was still far therefrom, for Wood-Isle was but one of those openings in Greenwood like unto Isle-Kol, though far the larger.

He knocked at the door, and a voice bade him enter. So when he entered, he found himself in a hall much like Hawk’s, but somewhat smaller, and less well furnished. Heron welcomed him warmly, and so also did his wife, who was named Agatha :

and they gave him a place of honour, and set much store by him.

Heron was a man who might be fifty years of age or thereabouts, tall and grey-eyed, and with a long beard fast turning grey. A very steady eye he had, and his speech was somewhat slow, as if he thought well over what he said in speaking. Agatha was comely, and it was easy to see that she was a happy woman, and wise : this much Palombris could see. They prayed Palombris to abide with them for a while. He told them that he went on a journey, and would take their guesting but that one night ; whereat they were sorry, yet glad that they might entertain him. Palombris sat down to table with them. He felt easier than he had felt at Hawk's board.

Said Heron : " What journey dost thou go on, young lord ? "

Palombris answered that he went to Barbizen. Then Heron was silent, though Palombris deemed by his face that he was not displeased. And presently he said :

" This is one of the things that are hard to speak of, because a man falls into two good minds about them. I think thou wilt find the way but a rough one ; yet my heart rejoices that thou wilt go to attain thine own place."

" Thou dost not fear for me, then ? " demanded Palombris.

" Well," quoth Heron, " I will not deny that ye will run into a good deal of danger ; but every man knows well that there is no refuge from that. Thy

due day will find thee out. Moreover, such men as thou art were never meant to shrink from danger, but to follow it, and to count honour and fame above death or danger."

"Deemest thou that I can hold mine own with the men of the great world?" asked Palombris.

"It seems to me as if that would be on thine own shoulders," answered Heron. "If the will is in thee, who shall be greater than thou?"

"I know not much," said Palombris, "nor am I sure as to what I shall have to deal with."

"I cannot counsel thee there," answered Heron, "but the world is made in much the same way everywhere, at root; 'tis only the small things that differ. Learn these last, and thou art on the road to be at home in all lands. But whoso knoweth not these things which are true in every place, he is an alien even in his own country."

"Thou thinkest well of me, Heron," said Palombris. "I desire to make of thee a true prophet."

Heron answered: "Some things will be easier than thou thinkest, and some harder. It is often so." Then after a while he said again: "I do not think thou wilt need to trouble over the hard things; they are safe enough. But beware of the easy ones, for it is there that thou art most likely to be caught napping."

Palombris gazed at him with steady eyes.

"I have heard of wise men in tales and ballads," he said, "but not yet have I met one. Still, thou art as like a wise man as any I look to meet."

Heron laughed heartily, and made answer:

"I will say nothing about that ; but I deem thou wilt find what I say to be well on the mark. And mind this, that he who can tell a wise man when he sees him is himself wise."

Palombris mused, and at last said : "There is one thing that seems strange to me : and I will tell thee what it is. Both thou and Hawk seemed to know me, and spoke as though I were no stranger. Yet never have I heard of you before, nor of the isles wherein your dwellings are."

Heron answered : "That is not so strange as thou wouldst think. We knew that a young lord was being nurtured in Isle-Kol, and we are both of us old enough to be able to count up the years since his birth. So about this time we have been looking to see him pass on the way to Barbizen ; for now thou wilt be sixteen years old by my reckoning."

"That is true," said Palombris.

"Thou seest, then," quoth Heron, "that it is no great wonder but that we speak as men who have waited for thy coming. I know the blood that is in thee ; thou art a man able to do great deeds, if thy will is that way. And truly, the time is ripe."

"Then thou thyself wondered somewhat," said Palombris, "to hear me ask questions betokening doubt ?"

"Yea and nay," quoth Heron. "'Tis no great harm for a young man to doubt his powers, so long as he goes forward none the less."

Then Palombris told him what Hawk had said.

Heron laughed again, but answered : "I will

say nothing against Hawk. What thou thinkest of him is most likely near the truth."

Palombris said no more as to that matter.

But presently he took up the word again, and said: "I am not sure in my mind what I shall accomplish, or what I shall have power or wish to do in the world. But I long to do great deeds, if I can find great deeds to do."

"There is plenty of room for that," said Heron.

Palombris answered: "Part of my pleasure in going to Barbizen lieth in that the way is perilous, and the place strange. There is a lure in it that I may not resist; else I should find it hard to leave the things I have loved."

"Dost thou leave any thing behind that I might care for on thy behalf?" asked Heron.

Then Palombris said: "I will ask of thee, Heron, one thing, which lieth near to my heart. I desire thee to look after my playmate Pallogris, and counsel her wisely, even as though it were myself."

"I will do that," quoth Heron.

Said Palombris: "It may not be wholly an easy task, for I shall demand account thereof, Heron, whereas some day I shall return and wed her."

"I would not say that," said Heron. "Ye know not what the years may bring."

"That," answered Palombris, nodding his head, "is no reason why thou shouldst not counsel her well."

Heron laughed, and assented.

The next morning early, Heron set Palombris

on his way, so that he did not see Wood-Isle by daylight. And when they came to part, Heron said to him :

“ Well, when thou art a great man, and dwellest in Barbizen, do not forget thy friends here. For it is thy task to handle the sword, and face death, and be powerful, and a mighty ruler according to the province God appointeth thee. But ours is to till the earth and tend the flocks of Wood-Isle ; and that is no less a task than thine. Now, we cannot get on without thee ; a great help thou canst be, in ways thou wilt understand later on ; but this I say, and it is sooth, that thou wilt find it wondrous well to thy profit to remember us, and care for us, for in us will thy chief strength be. Yea, it is that realm where the tiller of the soil is richest and proudest that thou shalt find the mightiest and most noble kings. Hearken well to this saying of mine.”

“ I do not think,” said Palombris, “ that I am so like to become a King as thou deemest, Heron.”

“ We shall see,” answered Heron.

And with that they parted, and Palombris fared on through the wood in the earliest dawn of morning.

CHAPTER III. OF THE LAND BEYOND THE WOOD

AFTER he had departed from Wood-Isle, Palombris saw no more dwellings of men, but the road ran on, straight and wide for the most part, yet all empty

and overgrown with grass. At whiles the wood was thick along its sides, and bushes were springing up, and little trees in the midst of the way ; and yet again there were fair dales and glades that opened out ; and once the road ran right across a deep valley, carried on a huge causeway of earth, whose sides were covered with grass and with berry bushes. But no man dwelt thereabouts. Thus he went for three days, he knew not how far, but it must have been very far ; until there was no more of the old path, and he was in a dale, wide and all covered with sweet green grass, but with hills of trees growing up on either side. Up the bent he saw a man.

So he called to the man, and said : “ I am going to Barbizen. Is this the right way ? ”

“ God save you,” answered the woodman. “ The way to Barbizen is always the wrong way, but this is it.”

“ Is Barbizen an evil place ? ” asked Palombris.

“ I know not, never having been there,” said the woodman. “ It may be that the place itself is better than the road to it. But if any man seeks death, he can find it in the Hills, and in the Debateable Wood.”

Palombris said nothing to this. But after a while the woodman showed him the way he should go, and he went on through the dales until late in the afternoon. And then, when it was nearing dusk, he came to the edges of the wood, and there was a hill-side going steeply down to a river, and beyond the river were great mountains, clear-cut

and bright in the evening sun. This was the end of Greenwood ; so that from the middle thereof to the edges was five days' walking.

He stayed there a while, looking over the land. The river flowed and wound amid great marsh flats, bright as emerald, wherein were water-fowl a many, and fishing pools. It was a great river, but all seemed quiet enough, as if only the birds dwelt there.

Palombris was strong and hardy, and did not fear sleeping in the wood on these fine spring nights. On the next day he awoke, and fared on down the hill till he came to the foot, where the bushes and trees ended, and the marsh began with reeds and long tussock grass and pools of water. On an island were two or three poor cottages, built of wattle-work and plastered over with clay, and so well roofed with reeds that they seemed like very little men with very large hats. Here he found a few folk, who gave him coarse black bread, and fish from the river, and afterwards ferried him over the water in a boat.

He thanked them, and said : " I have no money, but if ever I can do you good, I will do it."

The man who rowed the boat looked at him, and made answer : " Ye are of the great folk, by your looks, and not of the poor. We shall be well repaid if ye will do as ye promise, for our life is hard and bitter." Then after a while he said again : " That ye will do it is not unlikely, moreover."

Palombris did not ask why either of these things should be so ; but he saw that the people were

poor, and not like those he knew, for their food was of the coarsest, and they had ragged clothes : so he laid the words to heart, and went on his way.

CHAPTER IV. OF THE DRAGON HAUNT IN THE HILLS

So he climbed the hill path all day. It was wild and stony, the road being narrow, and often full of huge rocks, between which ran a little stream of clear water that flowed down and fell into brown pools. On each side rose up the mountains. But when it was near night, he came to a tower on a knoll. The knoll was high, and very steep, and on the top thereof were the battered keep and shattered walls and buttresses of an ancient castle, all broken and ruined with fire and war. He sat down and looked at it for long, because it made him think of the tower in Greenwood. But this place was a different and a worse one, very grim, dreary, and terrible, and the castle had been much greater in strength and bigness. Also, down by the stream he saw the bones of a man, as if some one had died there long ago, when that tower was destroyed in some unknown war. But no living person dwelt there. So when he had rested he went on, and behind the knoll found a small cabin of wattle-work plastered with clay. There was a bed of dry fern in it, and a spear over the little hearth, and such things as one would expect in a house where men live ; but no man was to be seen.

Palombris sat there until evening, for he did

not wish to sleep on the cold mountain with its bitter winds. And when it was about dusk, he saw a tall man with a dog, and a leash of hares in his hand, and a great spear on his shoulder ; and the man came near.

The man said nothing, but cast the hares into the hut, and brought wood to make a fire, and water from the stream to cook with. The great dog lay down beside Palombris, and lolled out his tongue. Presently the man had his fire alight, and began to cook the hares, and while he was doing this, he spoke and said :

“ It is not often that any man but myself comes this way.”

“ I travel to Barbizen,” said Palombris.

“ Whichever way you go, that is a bad way,” said the hill-man.

“ I have as yet found no harm in it,” answered Palombris.

“ That may be so,” said the hill-man, “ but thou wilt find harm enough in the Debateable Wood beyond the mountains. What dost thou know of these things, my lad ? ”

“ Nothing,” said Palombris.

“ Well,” answered the hill-man, “ there was a time, long ago, when the realm of Barbizen was a month’s journey from one end to the other. Yea, it went over into Greenwood, and beyond. This place belonged to it. In the treasury of the King, the King’s men gathered up the taxes every year with shovels, so much gold came to him. He had

a hundred thousand men of arms ; there was never any country so rich. But that time has long since gone."

" Why so ? " asked Palombris.

Said the hill-man : " It is true, my lad, that the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. And it was the poor folk who could have told thee why ; for the King deemed that his wealth came down from heaven, but the people knew that it came out of their bread. They went hungry, and they worked hard, and it was but a hair's breadth between them and trouble, for they had little to put by against the year of dearth. Then anon came fierce heathen men in ships up the river, who slew and burned and got great riches. They went away again ; but after that the land was never what it was before. First one place fell away and became waste, and then another, and the great men fought the King, and the King fought the great men, and the little men fought each other, and the war wrangled to and fro until the country grew to be as you see it. This tower on the knoll was once the stronghold of a great earl : now it is a ruin, and the war is chiefly in the Wood Debateable ; the King's men on one side, and the free lords on the other. Well," he said, " I live here now, and the life is a free one, if scanty. Few troubles come my way."

Palombris thought over this.

" What will come of it ? " asked Palombris.

" I know not," said the hill-man. " Troubles blow over after a while. I will tell thee an old tale.

Long before I was born, or the tower was built, a dragon dwelt in a cave under this knoll, and devoured all that came this way. Yea," said the hill-man, "whosoever came, king, earl, or knight, poor carle, man, or woman, the dragon seized and devoured them, and cast their bodies out upon the knoll. That was many years before I was born : and my father told me this tale."

"And what became of it ?" asked Palombris.

"Why," answered the hill-man, "I know not exactly ; but thou seest that all troubles blow over after a time. I suppose the dragon grew old, and died, and most men forgot it, and came and went freely. All troubles are like this ; they grow, and grow, and grow old, and die, and men remember them only in a tale that no one believes. Some day," said he, "the old King of Barbizen will die, and a new King will come with a hand of iron and a brow of brass, and clear the Debateable Wood and build the tower afresh ; and the country will flourish again, and grow as rich as before. Who knows ?"

"Dost thou wish that ?" asked Palombris, thinking that perhaps he might be such a King.

"Well, I know not," said the hill-man. "If it should turn out so, I may find something to do, or I may go higher up the hills. But the people would be glad, for theirs is a hard and bitter life ; so why should I grumble ? Let us eat and sleep, and to-morrow I will show you the way to the Wood Debateable."

CHAPTER V. OF A BATTLE IN THE WOOD DEBATEABLE

THEN the next morning the hill-man showed Palombris the way to the Wood Debateable. It went up and through the mountains by the steepest of all paths, sometimes broad, but oftentimes narrow and hard to climb, so that a few men could well defend it against many. Palombris noted how it went, and the passages by the way, and bore in mind all that he saw ; for it was the road that would lead him back to Pallogris. He fared on until he came over the crest of the pass, and thereafter the way sank again by easy slopes down to the low country beyond. It was a straight path, and when he was on the crest he had clear sight of the land whither he went, for it was spread out below him like a glorious map, bordered on the left hand and on the right, to west and to east, by the mountain rim. He saw the Debateable Wood, stretching far away, and plain and marsh, and rivers flowing as silver serpents in wide loops ; rich it was with the first sweet colours of spring.

When he had looked a while, a mist came drifting along the mountain side, as a thing wandering after somewhat that it had forgotten ; so he saw no more of the land of Barbizen, but went on his ways ; and when the mist had drifted away again, he could no longer see it.

The road was easier on this side of the hills, and no man could mistake it, or go astray on it.

So he had no need to search or wonder, but fared on as he would. And this was true, that it was no such great way down from the crest to the plain land as it had been on the other side, whereas here the land lay high. Soon he came out of the mountains into a great forest, which he thought would be the Debateable Wood. No people were there; all was wild and solitary, and the trees huge, and the brake thick, and still strewn with the bronze of autumn. Palombris was used to such places, and felt at home.

He trudged on with his staff, and slept in the wood; but the next day he began to see tracks that ran athwart the path, and the hoof-prints and droppings of horses, as though he drew near to places haunted by men. And then about noon he heard the trample of hoofs and the ring of steel, and saw a great company of fierce men well mounted coming towards him by the wood-path. They rode tall brown horses, and had wide hats of polished steel, that came down to their eyes, and they carried long spears. Some of them had archers with bows mounted up behind them. Palombris felt his heart beat to see these men, and he drew to one side to let them pass. But the foremost rider drew up, and wheeled his horse round, and so Palombris found himself a prisoner in a ring of mounted men.

Then they said: "Ho, here is a boy with a sword."

They waited awhile, until up rode a man on a huge milk-white horse. Of all men he was the

most wonderful that Palombris had ever seen : a king, it might be, yea, even the King of Barbizen. The horse was lathered and smoking, and the man wore a gown of steel rings polished till they blazed and shimmered like silver. Over this he had a coat of blue cloth, embroidered with many little golden tears. He was all shining steel and blue cloth ; even the white destrier was banded with blue ; and at his saddle hung a helm all burnished bright, with a curling ostrich feather in it. But on his head the knight wore only a little velvet cap with a brooch, so that his face could be seen.

He drew a silken kerchief from his sleeve, and wiped his brow softly, and then looked at Palombris.

“ What is thy name ? ” he demanded. “ And whither dost thou go with this sword ? ”

They all laughed or smiled.

Palombris answered : “ I come from Greenwood, and I desire to go to Barbizen. This is my father’s sword.”

“ What art thou going to do with it in Barbizen ? ” demanded the knight.

Said Palombris : “ I shall give it to the King.”

The knight gazed upon Palombris with great surprise.

“ It will be the first gift he has had out of the Debateable Wood for a long time past,” said he ; “ but perchance thou art speaking after a hidden manner. We must look into this.” Then he said : “ Sir John is hard behind, and we may not delay.

Put the boy up on a horse, and we will see what to make of him anon. On, sirs."

So one of the horsemen kicked a foot out of the stirrup, and Palombris put a foot in, and hopped up behind him. Then they all rode away swiftly into the wood. Palombris held on tight to the man before him.

Not far had they gone, ere they came to an open lawn in the wood, with a small river flowing along one side thereof, deeply overhung with trees. There was a man in a faded suit of blue, wearing a steel cap, and armed with a bow, who stood by one of the pools. When he saw them he waved his hand.

"Ho, Messire Flacandrin," he called out, "they have crossed the pebble ford. I doubt but that there are two companies."

"Shall we go forward, or turn back?" asked the knight.

"I counsel you to go on," answered the archer: and he leaped down into the river, and skipped across into the dense wood, where he was hidden, while the mounted men rode on down the glade. But before they had come to the further end, where the glade forked away into many little dales, there was a rush, and a great many men in white, both ahorse and afoot, came out of a by-path with great shouts. They were all dressed in white, some fresh and clean, some faded and soiled, but all with an eaglet spread on their breasts, and on the eaglet, a small blue bull, for they were

the men of the earl who held that march for the King. Then there was a leaping down of the archers of Flacandrin, that rode behind the mounted men, and the long arrows began to flash to and fro. And then there was a louder shout than before, and the earl's men shot all together, a great volley of shafts that sang and hummed like bees. Some flew idly away into the wood, some stuck in the ground, or in trunks of trees, but some went true, and men came tumbling to the earth.

Palombris was not sure as to what happened, for the horse he rode on gave a start, and fell, so that he was thrown into the blackberry bushes : and the man he had been riding behind fell likewise. But when Palombris crawled out, with his hands full of thorns, the man had cast off his sallet, and was creeping into the bushes. Palombris saw his legs.

The archers had ceased to shoot, and now they were fighting and mellaying together with short swords and with axes, and the mounted men were thrusting with spears and smiting with their swords. In the midst of the fight a horse bolted, and ran away galloping up the glade with his rider on his neck. But Palombris, seeing that he had fallen in with the men of the King of Barbizen, thought he should help them ; so he drew his father's sword out of its sheath, and looked about.

Although he did not understand what was happening, nor who was like to win that skirmish, he knew that some men were killed, and some



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the men of the King. Then the archers of Fla mounted men, a to and fro. Ar than before, and a great volley of bees. Some flew stuck in the ground went true, and r

Palombris was for the horse he that he was there and the man he wise. But when hands full of them and was creeping his legs.

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thought he should help them; so he drew his father's sword out of its sheath, and looked about.

Although he did not understand what was happening, nor who was like to win that skirmish, he knew that some men were killed, and some

sorely hurt, for there was blood on the grass, and men in blue or in white who lay still, albeit some groaned. But soon he was aware of a knight pinned to the ground by a fallen horse, while two men in blue thrust at him with long spears. They could not break his strong harness, but at every thrust the knight cried out, Ho, and beat at the spears with his sword, if he might cut them through. Palombris saw that he was of the King's party. Now went Palombris towards him, crying, "For the King," as did the men in white; but his heart beat, and he feared that he was about to be killed, and would see Pallogris no more.

Then one of the two men turned, and lunged at him, and the spear-head tore his left hand a little; but Palombris put the stroke by deftly, marvelling that an expert man of arms should deal so slight a stroke; and he struck with his sword, and the man fell suddenly into the grass as if by magic. Palombris could not see well, for his eyes were swimming, and he trembled, and half he expected to wake up, and find it to be a dream. Then he saw the other man start and turn, and he struck again swiftly, and hard as he might, and the spear shaft flew against his chin like a thunder-bolt, so that he and the man both fell together.

Now was Palombris greatly afraid that he was slain and dead, for he knew that he lay in the grass, which was thick about him; and his strength ebbed from him, and he began to dream strangely, and had no life in his limbs. And after

that he awoke from sleep to find himself propped against a tree, and a man, an archer in white livery, giving him fiery, stinging wine out of a leathern bottle.

CHAPTER VI. HERE IS TOLD THE MEETING OF PALOMBRIS WITH JOHN OF THE MARCHES, IN THE WOOD DEBATEABLE; AND HOW PALOMBRIS ENTERED HIS SERVICE

WHEN the archer saw Palombris awake, he withdrew a little, and stood gazing down upon him. A stout and strong man he was, and on his breast ramped the blue bull of the King.

"Damoiseau," said he, gravely, "thou art a goodly boy, with no wasteful length of limb. Tell me if thou art able to walk or not."

Palombris rose up unsteadily, but when he stood again on his feet his head cleared, and he found himself whole and well, and the sun shining peacefully, slant-wise through the wood.

"Truly," he answered, "I am able to walk. Which is the way to Barbizen?"

"This way is the shortest of all," quoth the archer, "for a man of few years and many desires." He took Palombris by the arm and led him across the wood lawn. Palombris saw that there was a pavilion pitched in the glade, and to this the archer led him. The pavilion was all of white, with little eagles sewn all over it, and beside it flew a banner on which was a blue

bull. Therein sat a knight all armed save his head. He was a man not very tall, but of goodly size, and well made, with a face somewhat long and narrow, and strong in the chin, clean shaven and smooth, and encrimsoned with wind and sun. His black hair was cropped close, and was sparse over the temples, for he was somewhat on in years, and seemed to be one who carried care on his shoulders. This was a new kind of king for Palombris to gaze upon. He was clad in no such beautiful splendour as Flacandrin, and his harness, though damascened, was worn with long use.

"Sir John," quoth the archer, "here is the man."

"It is a boy," answered Sir John, smiling.

"If it were a baby, it would suffice," said the archer. "The mouse that nibbled the net let loose the lion."

John of the Marches gazed upon Palombris until Palombris was abashed. He sat rocking himself gently back in a little chair. His glance was nothing unkind, but it was most keen and searching, and very steady, neither shifting nor wavering. Then he took up a sword, and looked well at it, and thumbed the edge near the point, and turned it over, and let his eyes travel down the bright blade; and presently he held it out and said:

"Whose sword is this?"

"It was once my father's," answered Palombris; "and now it is mine."

"Who was thy father?" asked John.

"I know not his name," answered Palombris, colouring, "but I have a grandsire, who lives in Greenwood."

"It is a noble sword," said John of the Marches. "Look,"—and he took it between fingers and thumbs, and bent it nearly to a circle. "There are no jewels upon the hilt," said he, "but it is a sword that few men would forget, for it is one made by a great armourer for a fighting man. Tell me, has none ever told thee the name of thy father?"

"Nay, none ever did so," answered Palombris.

"Still," said John, "they spoke of names in thy hearing, did they not? And of those names, one was Kol of Grebana."

"I know not," said Palombris. "I never heard that name."

The knight let the sword drop, and said nothing. Palombris had never beheld a man so strong, and yet so easy of courtesy. Presently John held the sword out to him, and gave it back to him.

"Tell me whither thou goest," he said.

"To Barbizen and the King, for that was my grandsire's bidding," answered Palombris.

"Well," said John, "thou hast done me great good, and I am not ungrateful. I am the earl of these marches, and of all the border land around the Debateable Wood. If thou wilt come with me, in due time thou shalt see the King far better than thou couldst ever contrive of thyself alone."

"I will gladly do so," answered Palombris.

It was towards nightfall when they came out of the Debateable Wood, for they rode far and fast through the glades and the forest ways. But when evening was bright with the spring sun, just before its setting, they came to a great tower beyond the wood : Palombris caught his breath to see it. It was not old and ruined, but fresh and strong. The walls were of grey stone, and went up and up to the very sky, with a gathered mass of steep blue roofs clustered high in air, and great gilded weather vanes that swung and glittered in the evening air. There was a flash of mailed watchmen from the ramparts, and a bell chimed the hour very sweetly over the green flat country, which was full of cornland, and orchards, and grazing meadows, with well made roads running between. When they came near, there was a great wet ditch all about the castle, where water lilies grew under the walls ; and a vast gate, guarded by turrets and galleries, that looked over the water.

Then one of John's men unslung a horn, and blew ; and some one in the tower blew again ; and they gathered opposite the gate. So after a while the gate began to fall, and it was a draw-bridge, for behind it was the real gate, iron-bound and covered with hinges cut to look like lions. Palombris saw the chains paid out, but he could not guess whence or how they came ; and presently the bridge fell into its socket, and the gates went open, and he heard the drumming thunder of hoofs as they all rode over, with the green water below them in the ditch.

They were not half way over when John drew up, and they all stopped, for there were a lady and a stout old man with keys at his girdle, who stood in the middle of the bridge. John raised his cap so that Palombris wondered afresh; and he sprang down lightly, and kissed the lady on the cheek, and they spoke together a little while. Then he pointed to Palombris.

"Madame," he said, "I have brought you the son of Kol of Grebana, who this day has entered my service. Let him be our guest."

She smiled, and kissed Palombris on the forehead, and took his hand into hers, saying: "Thou art more than welcome. Great things should come of thee." Whereat he blushed again, and marvelled more than ever at John of the Marches, who seemed to know many things, and to do each rightly.

So they paced on slowly, and came under the mighty arches of the gate: and after that all was for many days a dream to Palombris, for he saw a great square court, and many people, and marvellous things,—windows of coloured glass, and tapestries hung around the walls, bearing on them pictures of all the tales he had ever heard, and many more that he had heard not of, and indeed so many things that it was long before he knew what they were, or meant. And so wondrous were those first days of learning in the March Castle, that he thought that scarce were any days quite like those; for all things were new to him, and he was of age old enough to

perceive their wonder and their beauty. Albeit, greater things and finer came about afterwards. And in this Tower of the Marches he dwelt for a year with John.

It was about half a year after Palombris came there that he wrote letters to Pallogris and to his grandsire. He sat in a chair and dictated the letters to a clerk; they were written out very finely on parchment, with a golden letter at the top, made especially for Palombris, and sealed with John's high seal, which was pressed into the wax. In the letters he told of all that had befallen him since he left the tower in Isle-Kol that was in Greenwood; and how he had encountered with John of the Marches, and had entered his service, and was living there beyond the Debateable Wood. He said that he had not yet gone to Barbizen, but John had promised that he should go there shortly. And this is some of the letter he wrote to Pallogris :

“ Dear playmate, I shall shortly go to Barbizen, and I hope to be no worse off there than I am here : surely no man could be better. In this place we fight much, and I am learning the ways of war and the customs of great people. I am one of Sir John's men, and he teaches me. It is not hard to learn. For half a year I have been damoiseau ; and now I shall be esquire, until I have done some deed of arms and acquired my knighthood, but when that will come about I cannot tell. When I have achieved my fame, I shall come again to Greenwood, and build the tower afresh, and we will live

there as before, but better, as Sir John lives here with his dame, for I perceive that they do all that we wish to do. And in all things, playmate, I love thee as well as ever I did, and even the more because it is long since I have seen thee, and my heart desires to be near thee. Each evening I share my thoughts with thee, and tell thee all I have thought of, as our wont has been ; tell me if any of them come to thee. In the cap of John of the Marches there is a brooch of gold for his dame ; and I have an iron buckle for my shoe that thou gavest me, and now I wear it in my cap to remember thee by. There are many things to be seen and known here that are not in Greenwood, such things as we have heard of in tales ; and I desire that we shall make a true tale of this, that men shall speak of our love and our deeds, that we were true lovers while we lived, and left the land better than we found it."

When Palombris had got this said, he observed that the shaven clerk was gazing at him strangely over his shoulder. He asked if aught was wrong with the letter ; but the brother said no, and after a while went on writing till all was finished.

And after it had been written out, it was sealed, and tied with a blue cord, and a man carried it to Greenwood.

Pallogris had the letter not long after, and was more than glad to have it. She might not read it, for she had not learned so much, but she asked the man many questions of Palombris, and he

answered them truly, till her heart beat and fainted by turns. He told her that there was no young man of that land who promised to be nobler than Palombris : all men and women loved him greatly, because he had fair words and kindness to them all, and he was growing swiftly to be a hardy soldier of the marches, wise in leading and strong in battle, and much looked upon by the free lords. All of which Pallogris dreamed of at night, and was happy and sorrowful : happy, because it seemed most sweet and wonderful that Palombris her playmate should prove so great a man, and sorrowful, because her heart misgave her lest he should presently become too great, and forget her, and all the poor things of his boyhood. So she lived with remembrance of him, and hope and fear, but always love, for she could have forgotten herself sooner than him, and have died, sooner than know that he had forgotten her.

But all this while she had not read his letter, but carried it about with her, until such time as she might be able to read it, or might find some one she trusted, who would read it for her.

CHAPTER VII. HERE IS TOLD HOW JOHN OF THE MARCHES BROUGHT PALOMBRIS TO BARBIZEN

PALOMBRIS served out that year, and more, with Sir John, and he lost the pink and white cheeks he had brought with him out of Greenwood, and got the brown and red of a man, which never

afterwards left him. He grew in strength until few young men were so strong, yet he was neither tall nor broad. He could run and ride and leap ; he could use all manner of weapons skilfully. He learnt all the craft of dealing with horses ; he could play at chess, and carve meat as the custom was in those days. He learnt to sing, and to play on the little harp ; he learnt all things and was lucky to boot, and kind, and never tired. All deemed him the flower of young men ; there were few women but would do any thing he asked ; yet although he was courteous and gay, he never saw any woman who was more to his eyes than any other, or one whit so kind to his memory as Pallogris, who dwelt in Greenwood.

All the Debateable Wood was under the care of John of the Marches, and a great part of the plain land, from the river to the mountains, east and west. All that was his earldom, to rule in the name of the King ; but Palombris soon understood that this earldom was hard to hold, and full of foes and evil-doers who laid no store by the King, but did as was pleasant in their own eyes. These John fought with the hard hand, and never a week went by when they did not hear of raiding, and sometimes of burning and pillaging, for the men of the Wood Debateable never rested, but were always at work robbing (which was a great part of their livelihood), and not seldom burning the houses of the people. They were here to-day and gone to-morrow in the great woodlands whose edges touched the fair and sweet plain. It was

hard to fight them, for they were fierce and strong and very many ; and in harvest time, when the corn was ripe, and being gathered, and all the vines were heavy with grapes ready for the wine-press, Palombris was often awakened by the roaring horn of the watchers who gazed out into the night from the tower, and saw the red flames burning afar off. Then they used to rise up, and arm, and hurry out pell-mell, with John of the Marches first of all, and there was riding in the dark along unknown roads, and battles, and scimmishes, and all kinds of strange adventures.

Many were the foes in the Wood Debateable, and various of kind. There were lords who were at feud with the King, every one had forgotten why ; and lords who would not pay homage or service, but wished to be sole lords in their own domains ; and other lords, who fought the King out of perversity, and because their friends did it, although they paid him homage, and service when so it pleased them. And moreover, there were robber lords, who lived mostly by raiding and reiving, and Free Companions, who came from all the four winds, and had chosen captains over them, that were very deadly men. And all these not only fought John of the Marches, who was rightfully their lord, but they also fought each the other to boot. But when, at odd times, they all leagued together to fight the King, then it was time for John of the Marches to shut himself up in the March Castle, and wait till they fell out among

themselves (which came to pass sooner or later), and went away ; for they were far more in number than he, when leagued together.

John said that Palombris was lucky, for after he came they began to do better in these things than aforetime. It was not long before he came that the lords and the companies had burned and pillaged throughout the March country, and shut the earl's men up in the tower for two months before they departed again. But Palombris learnt the manner of this fighting till few men were so expert as he. It came to him easily, after all he had done as a boy in Greenwood. He knew the wood paths as well as any, and the times in which to look for attacks ; and he loved to sit on the top of the walls with his legs in the air, gazing out over the Debateable Wood, and to reason out what their foes were thinking and devising, and whence they would come, until some thought he had second sight. In the winter he could go across snow and ice, by reason of his smallness and lightness, and his hardy health ; and he feared neither water nor marsh. The lords and companions deemed him some sort of imp, and most of all men feared and hated him of the Iron Buckle ; for they called him the man with the Buckle in his Cap, and said that he never slept, and was more subtle than a fox. Yet Palombris loved sweet things, and wore still the face of a boy ; and he remembered Pallogris, and was full of life and eagerness.

But there were other things which John of the Marches willed that Palombris should learn. Now these were the tasks in which Palombris helped Sir John, and was taught to do well. First there was the watching and defence of the land, the pursuit of all robbers and evil-doers, and the fighting of all foes, whosoever they might be; and next there was the care and furnishing of all castles and strong places, which was a hard task, yet without it could no fighting be done, nor the land held. Sir John shewed Palombris all the art of strongholds, in what way to furnish them, and how to convey munitions into them, and to adjudge what was needed therein; and which places were meet for building them, and the right manner of their building, together with engines, and all that pertained to defence and to intaking. Then there was the gathering of tribute, both that which was due to the earl, and that which belonged to the King; wherewith went much labour, because each man paid his tribute and tax in his own way, and claimed rights of custom, and he who saw to the ingathering had to wit well of the truth of these claims, and sift them out right carefully, lest from error come great trouble, and the King be defrauded, or the folk oppressed, which must be avoided. Then also there were the earl's assizes, wherein he sat to judge appeals from smaller courts; and Palombris heard long talks between the earl and the steward who assessed the law for him, and in this way he learnt much of these matters,

and could have sat in an earl's court and made no mistake. And hence, also, he heard many strange tales that he could not have believed had he not heard them testified on oath, and these he remembered. Here he learnt what writs ran in the King's name, and what in the earl's, and when they were good, and when invalid, and of deeds and titles, and customs, until he knew them all, and what they were for,—and with John of the Marches were men as wise in these things as any on earth, and well able to tell of them. And although Palombris never learnt to write well, since his hands did not turn that way, he soon learnt to read, and could understand the Latin of clerks as well as the speech of the land that he had been bred in.

And therewithal were hunting and hawking, and squiring of dames, and such disports; so that Palombris found little time hang heavy on his hands, but was ever busy.

Palombris had nought to unlearn; for as John perceived, all that he knew when he came to the tower was right, and he knew it well, so that he had but to add thereto, which is no such great trouble. And this he did swiftly, and blossomed apace. John was glad at the promise of his damoiseau and esquire, and he and his dame looked on Palombris as though he were their own son. For neither son nor daughter had they, and they were ready to spend love freely on any one who seemed to them such as their own son might have been. And they planned for him,

also, and had many conferences together, devising how best to do things for him ; whereof he guessed nothing.

So the time wore on.

Then one day Sir John gave out that he would go to Barbizen ; and he said : “ Thou, Palombris, shalt be the first of those who come with me ; not only because I promised that thou shouldst go, but also because thou deservest well, and will shew men that we too have youths growing up amongst us. And if I were to judge any kingdom, Messires,” he said, “ I should seek to behold its young men, and to perceive who should rule it to-morrow.”

It was summer time when they set out, and they were armed in their finest arms. They were a week upon their roads, and they came to one noble burgh after another, and each was better than the last, but none was Barbizen. But at last they saw before them the mightiest city of all, with great towers and ramparts, and tall spires of churches ; and the bells rang over the flat country at dusk when the sun shone over the land and upon many strange casemented windows with lozenge panes, and the western sky was glorious with crimson and gold, and the vanes glittered, and the roofs shone. And that was Barbizen. So Palombris did indeed come there at last, but instead of creeping in ragged and poor, he rode in at the left hand of John of the Marches, mounted on a tall

white horse, and with a blue bull embroidered on his surcoat, and John's deer hounds running beside him, and half the fighting men of the Marches pressing on closely in his rear, with their lances like a forest. He looked down with strange pity on the crowds of folk, for he felt the swift and mighty destrier between his knees, and he felt the weight of his armour, and it seemed as though he had become very great and strong, yea, a king amongst men. And when he saw a way-worn man with a bundle, resting by a street corner, his heart swelled again, for he thought that this might be the old Palombris, and himself a new man.

That night they slept in lodgings at an hostel, where the windows were long and low, and strange gargoyles peeped from the roofs. There was a crush of many men, and the gleam of great tankards, for they all sat together, both knights and esquires, and also the varlets, and room could scarce be found for them. But Sir John, after he had supped, went straight to bed, and Palombris had a couch of straw in the same room.

Then on the morrow they rose up, and arrayed themselves, and they rode forth from the inn most splendidly. John of the Marches had a collar of gold and jewels that sparkled in the sun, and many of his knights were arrayed no less richly. But Palombris was poor, and came in his plain livery of white, with the eagle and the blue bull on his breast, and the iron buckle in his cap; but his dark hair was blacker than jet,

and his cheek as rich as any ruby, so that among all that great company men picked him out, because he was not richly arrayed, nor had need to be.

So presently they came to the courts of a great palace, vast and high, and yet with such signs about it as would make a man deem it fallen somewhat from its high estate; for indeed in these times the old King could not sustain such grandeur as his fathers had. But they rode in, and were well received; and soon they were passing through many noble rooms, and up many steps, all of marvellous stone, until they came to a long Council-Chamber, arched with beams of dark oaken wood, and with many windows round about. The walls were hung two men's height with woven tapestries, and above that glowed windows of coloured glass, like jewels. And on a great chair sat the old King. His gown was edged with purple, and he had a medallion upon his breast, hanging from a golden chain; and on his feet were shoes of purple.

Old he looked, yet not very aged. His visage was smooth shaven, and thin, and kindly and serene; most noble it was, and beautiful, and his mouth was sweet and gentle, more gentle than befitted a great King who must needs grapple with the forceful and crafty. His hands were long and delicate, and on one finger he had a ring set with a sapphire. Such a King he was, as Palombris had seen in dreams, and heard of

in songs and tales, august and kind and quiet, and the son of a King, and the offspring of great men. He smiled when he saw them, and beckoned graciously.

Sir John bowed, and touched the floor with one knee ; and after that he rose erect, and drew Palombris by the arm, and brought him before the King's seat, saying :

" Sir, I bring to you that homage which my fathers ever paid to thine, and which I pay thee because of good desire, and love and loyalty, as they did. Sir, also I bring you a youth who has come a long journey to see you. I encountered him in the Wood Debateable, and had him into my service a while, until I might bring him to you. Is it your pleasure to see him ? "

" Assuredly, messire," said the King, studying John's face with gentle intentness. " So fair a youth is welcome to us."

Then said John : " Speak your message to the King, Palombris."

Palombris dropped on his knee courteously, and said :

" Sir, I have come a long journey from Greenwood, for my grandsire ordained that I should seek your service, if you would be pleased to admit me thereto. And to this end he gave me the sword I bear, and bade me give it to you."

The King cast his eyes a little upward, and away, towards the majestic windows that glowed ; and for a space he answered nothing. But when he had thought a little, he looked downwards

again, and there was a great silence in the room. Many men craned their heads forward to see Palombris, and these for the most part among the older men, whose hair was grey or white; and the Knights of the Marches stood there in silent ranks behind John.

“What name had your father?” asked the King.

Palombris reddened, but answered: “Sir, if the truth must be told, I know not, and never dreamed of asking. But my grandsire is an old man, white of beard, and tall, and he lives in a tower in Isle-Kol of Greenwood, that was overthrown in forgotten wars.”

Again the King cast his eyes upward, and seemed to think deeply; and when he lowered them he said:

“Fair cousin, we are full of joy that thou shouldst come to us in this manner, and without doubt we shall see thee advance thyself most honourably. When our Council is over, we will speak again.”

So Palombris withdrew; but he had heard the old King call him cousin, and he wondered greatly at that.

He had not long been in the outer room, where stood many pages and esquires, richly arrayed and very haughty, when a seneschal came anigh, and beckoned him, and led him to a small room, which looked like to be the King's Cabinet. The window was wide open, and the sun and the warm air came in, sweet with the fragrance of gardens;

and through it he saw the fairest gardens in the world, such as he could not have believed, wide pleasaunces, sweet and solitary, full of spreading trees and bright flowers and grassy lawns; and beyond that the burgh spread out, tower and street and rampart and spire, ending in the vague horizon, and the fields shining in the light.

CHAPTER VIII. OF PALOMBRIS AND HIS SPEECH WITH THE OLD KING; AND OF THE TALE OF KOL AND HIS DAME

A LONG time passed, but Palombris waited patiently, and at length he heard a hidden door open, and the old King raised the woven hangings. Slowly he moved towards his chair, and drew it where he could see forth out of the window into the glorious sunshine and the sweet flowered garden, and over the mighty burgh. A man followed him, who was short, swarthy, and round of face; a man with mighty arms and shoulders.

“Palombris,” quoth the King, “come hither.” And when he had come: “Draw forth thy sword, and show it to this man.”

Palombris drew the sword out of its sheath, and it flashed and glittered like sun-flecks on a sea. The swarthy man received it, and handled it as John of the Marches had done aforetime, looking at the blade, and bending it,—for he was a sword-smith, and the most skilled man of all sword-smiths known.

“Yea, lord,” quoth he, shortly, “this is veritably

a work of my master the great sword-smith : and I deem it to be the sword of Kol of Grebana. No such work as this can be counterfeited. It will cut steel."

"It sufficeth," said the King. So the sword-smith gave the sword back to Palombris, and went out through the door.

The King arose, and led Palombris to the window, and held his shoulders with long thin fingers, gazing steadily at him. He touched the cheek of Palombris with his finger, and turned his head half round ; then he kissed him gravely, and sat down again.

"Palombris," he said, "I knew thy father and thy mother, and my heart is glad as the summer to deem thee their son. Didst thou ever know aught of thy mother ?"

"Nay, never," said Palombris.

The old King unbuttoned the breast of his gown, and drew forth a fine chain of gold, and a medallion ; and when he pressed the spring of the medallion, it flew open, and therewithin was a woman's face portrayed.

"This was she," he said, with a little radiance in his countenance that was not quite a smile, but near it.

Palombris knelt and gazed strangely at it ; for it was the face of a young bride, painted so that it did all but move : yea, a most lovely and sweet face, so that his heart trembled to look upon it. Had she indeed once held him in her arms, and had his lips touched her breast ? That

must have been another Palombris, he thought ; and yet almost he fancied that he remembered it in some way, in dreams if not in waking, so fitting it was. It turned all the day into a greater beauty ; so that when he looked over the silent bee-haunted pleasaunces and sun-bathed city, he could not doubt any thing of this. He shook a little as he arose.

“ I am not so old as thou mayst perchance think, Palombris,” said the King, closing the medallion and returning it to its place. “ I am not above fifty and six years of age. I loved thy mother. I was a King’s son, and she was the fairest woman in Barbizen, and the youngest of my cousins in blood. Never was a woman nobler, sweeter, or more desirable to the soul of man than she was ; yea, I might name every thing a woman should be and possess, and she was all, and had all. But thy father, Palombris, Kol of Grebana, was among men what she was among women : a most noble man, valiant and daring and mighty of his hands, and strong of temper,—and I was but a King’s son, and a feeble one at that. So they were wedded. . . .” The King pointed forth through the window, to where the great minster rose. “ There they were married, and my father, who was King before me, led her to the high altar : never since has such splendour been seen in Barbizen.” He smiled a little ruefully. “ We are too poor now.”

Palombris smiled too.

“ I never forgave Kol,” said the King, sadly.

“It was good for her, and it was good for him ; I gave them my benison, as I give it now,—for there were no people nobler on the earth, nor any that I loved more ; but it was hard to forgive. Dost thou think it better, Palombris, to have a foe thou canst hate, or one thou must love ? ”

“One thou must love,” answered Palombris.

“It may be that thou art right,” said the King. “Thou shalt give me reasons some other day, Palombris, for it is my pleasure to hear all debates upon courtoisie. She bore three children to Kol ; thou, Palombris, wert the youngest.”

Palombris answered nothing. Then said the King :

“The sea rovers came up the river the year thou wert born, but no word came ahead of them. I could not bear that Kol should be in Barbizen when I was King. I sent him to one of the great March strongholds ; they called it Flowery Garth. It lieth by a great flood southward, on the edges of Greenwood, for there lay the Marches of this realm in those days, albeit now they lie no further than the wood called Debateable. Kol owed his death to that, for the sea rovers came in the night, and they took Flowery Garth, and levelled it with the earth. Kol alone fought his way out, with his sword in one hand and thou, Palombris, in the other, a tiny child no larger than a small cushion. We heard of that, for it was much spoken of. And before he went, he saw his dame and his two elder children slain

by the rovers, unless he slew them himself, as sometimes I dream in the night. . . . We knew no more of Kol ; but it was told to me that he went to his father in Greenwood, and there died of his wounds ; somewhat whereof we may now believe to be the truth. O, I had not wished that, for I loved him ; I had wished only that he should be away from Barbizen. Yet his death lay at my door."

"I shall not grieve either for him or for her," said Palombris, softly. "For I can think of many worse lives and deaths."

"I think," said the King, "that thy grandsire knew well what would befall thee in Barbizen. I will give to thee what Kol would have desired. Make thyself as great a man in this realm as thou canst. I cannot make thee one, but I can smooth thy path, and I will do so. And there is no woman in this land but will be glad of thy love, for if thou hast Kol's heart, there is no man able to be thy better. Please me, Palombris, by shewing that Barbizen is the richer for thee. And for thy beginning, this day I appoint thee among my esquires, if John of the Marches consenteth. The rest shall be in thine own hands. I will neither cross thee, nor put thee where thou art not able to sustain thyself."

"I thank you," answered Palombris. "I know not what I may accomplish ; but it is a good gift."

"Go thou to the door," quoth the King, "and open it, and bid Giroflanz come to me."

Palombris opened the door, and held open the hangings.

"The King calleth for Giroflanz," he cried, clearly.

There came a young esquire, of the same age as Palombris; he too wore the white array and the blue bull,—but the white was nobly slashed with blue satin, and there was a collar of pearls about his neck. Most proud was Giroflanz. He was a little taller than Palombris, but slim of build, unto slightrness; and he had fair tawny hair, nearly golden, and very fine, and blue eyes, and a pale, fresh face, and long fingers, and his face was somewhat long and thin. In all ways he seemed to be fresh and sweet, a very rainbow, yet so haughty that he would scarce look at any one. He passed under the hangings and stood before the King.

"Giroflanz," quoth the King, "I present to you a youth who shall from this day be of my household. He is fit to be thy friend."

"How if we quarrel?" demanded Giroflanz.

The King let a shadow cross his face; but Palombris answered: "I will take care of that."

"Let it be so," said the King, smiling.

In this manner Palombris and Giroflanz became acquainted, of which afterwards sprang a great part of the tale told in this book, as shall presently be seen.

"And now," said the King, "bid them saddle my palfrey, and find horses for yourselves; for we will go to pay a visit."

CHAPTER IX. HERE IS TOLD OF ONE WHO HAD WAITED FOR A MAN TO COME ; AND HE WELCOMES PALOMBRIS

THE King rode on a little white palfrey, and with him rode Palombris and Giroflanz, and a small company. They went out through an arched gateway, and along many fair streets, until they came to a mighty house, so great that it might well have been a king's palace : and they turned into a grassy court, and there dismounted.

There were many fair windows around that court, and a great stillness lay over all, albeit it was in no way deserted of folk. The King took Palombris by the arm, and led him slowly up a stair into a hall. It was a large hall, full of strange things ; for on the walls were great cases of books, and between them hung tapestries ; and in all that hall there seemed to be no man. But when Palombris looked again, he saw a chair far off at the end of the hall, and therein lay a man dressed all in scarlet, with a little scarlet cap on his head ; and behind the chair stood a man all garbed in silver grey, who went out forthwith by a door, as soon as he perceived the King.

Then the man who sat in the chair cried out in a high small voice, and said : " Ha, cousin, thou art welcome. Come hither, I pray thee."

So the King approached with Palombris, and when they were near, Palombris saw that the man in the chair was exceeding old, and so thin and

frail that it was a wonder to see him ; withal, he had very large bright eyes, that flashed and gazed keenly, and searched out all things.

“ I bring thee a guest, cousin,” quoth the King. And to Palombris he said : “ This is my kinsman, the archbishop, who is the head of all churchmen in this realm, and a wise man.”

The archbishop gazed at Palombris ; and suddenly his eyes changed, and Palombris was somewhat abashed.

“ Come hither, young man,” quoth he, in his thin voice ; and when Palombris approached, the archbishop gazed at him very steadily, and rose up somewhat in his chair. And he gazed as a man who is caught unawares, and much surprised.

Then he said : “ Well I know who it is that I see before me : for if this is not a son of Kol, then am I clean bereft of wits.”

Palombris stood by his chair, looking down upon him. The archbishop was the King’s cousin by blood, and as like him as one pea is like another. They both had fine, gentle features, and blue eyes, and fingers beautifully long and shapely ; but the archbishop was the older man, and the frailer.

“ I know not the name of my father,” said Palombris, “ for it never was told me.”

“ Some one has been wiser than it is commonly given to men to be,” answered the archbishop. Then he took the hand of Palombris in his own hand, and regarded him.

“ When I woke up this morning,” he said, “ I was discontented, because for long past there had

happened little to speak of. And I wondered why the sun shone so brightly, and why the clouds were as white and as fleecy as of old ; and it was a marvel to me that the flowers grew, and the wind blew, whereas nothing was happening. The truth is, I am old, and no one seemed young any longer. And now thou art here, young man, and I understand why the world flourished : for I remember that I am young still, although my gross material body waxes old with the passing of days."

"Truly," answered Palombris, "ye give me wondrous good welcome."

The archbishop looked at the King, and the King looked at him ; and the archbishop said : "Now, this is of all things the most marvellous, and beyond my wits ; and the ways of God are certainly above my understanding. I have heard of ghosts and of spirits, but if Kol's ghost had come to me, it would have been but Kol's ghost, whereas here before me is a new man, with Kol's ways, and Kol's voice, and the very visible frame and structure of Kol ; and I know not what to make of it. Assuredly the begetting of children is a work more wonderful than any other ; and I rejoice in this day."

"Sir," answered Palombris, "if I am like my father, I have hope that I may yet do well."

"Ye may well say so," quoth the archbishop. "And now I pray you to leave me a while. And if the King my cousin can spare you, come to my noon meal, for I desire to speak with you."

So they left him at that time ; but when noon

approached, Palombris found the archbishop again. He sat in a great refectory, all white and clean, as if it had been builded of snow.

The archbishop's chair was set beside an oaken table, and by it stood two monkish brethren in grey habits, silent and quiet men. The archbishop ate raisins out of a bowl, and little else ; but he bade Palombris be served with fine and delicate dishes, and save the two brethren who waited upon him, none other was near ; albeit the long tables were full with many men.

Then while they ate, the archbishop asked him of his youth, and in what way he had come unto Barbizen ; and Palombris answered him. And so peaceful and leisurely was that place, that Palombris soon told more than he had looked to tell, and felt it in no wise out of the way. And their speech drifted from one matter to another, but all was profitable, and all was sweet and fair.

“ A most wise man was thy grandsire,” said the archbishop. “ I see whither his thoughts tended ; for he had trust in the worthiness of his blood, and thought to guard thee from evil things. And so it has fallen out, that thou hast grown up unhurt by the world, till now thou art formed and settled, and shaped wholly by the finger of God and the things of the woodland which he created. And that is a great pleasure.”

“ I do not know how any man could have greater happiness than I had,” said Palombris.

“ But now,” said the archbishop, “ having enjoyed that perfect growth and repose, thou art

as a fine tool formed for its due purposes. What hast thou thought thereof ? ”

“ I followed whithersoever I was led,” said Palombris.

“ That is a good plan,” said the archbishop, falling on thought ; “ and thou hast been led hither. Now, I do not think thou wilt ever find again the things thou hast left in Greenwood. If thou lovest that happy time, it will only be found again ahead of thee, by going on, not by going back.”

“ Then I will go on,” said Palombris.

The archbishop studied in his mind, and took his little golden box from off the board.

“ Be my friend,” he said. “ We old men live in you that are young ; in you, we ourselves are young again, and we can counsel well, if ye will hear us. Now, thou hast seen but half of the world, and I were fain that thou sawest what else goes to its making.”

“ I thought I had seen more than but a half,” said Palombris.

“ Think not that those hunting, hawking, fighting men are the most powerful men in the world,” answered the archbishop, dipping a finger into his box. “ They count less than thou thinkest. It is we who are the most of import.”

“ How so ? ” asked Palombris.

The archbishop put a finger into his mouth.

“ Because the gift of governance is in us like a holy flame,” he said. “ I have treasured it, and tended it, and kept it alight, waiting for the man

to come who would profit by it. If he does not come, my hands are clean of the matter ; I have done my best."

He held out the box to Palombris.

"What kind of man would he be ?" asked Palombris, dipping his finger into the box.

"One who was not the victim of his own vanities, quarrels, and pleasures," answered the archbishop. "A man who cared for the realm and its wealth, and for understanding, and for wisdom, and for doing the will of God. One, withal, who is not changeable, nor yet obstinate, but is of strong faith and swift obedience." Then he said : "How likest thou this sugar ?"

"Passing well," quoth Palombris, smiling.

"Hast thou tasted sugar ere now ?"

"Never," answered Palombris.

"Thou art one of us," quoth the archbishop. "All our kinsfolk loved it. It comes to thee through thy mother."

"Such men as thou art speaking of are rare," said Palombris.

"How knowest thou that ?" demanded the archbishop. "But thou art right, all the same. Now, as to our kinsfolk, they have fallen somewhat on evil days. We have bred too fine, and ceased to have strong men in our kindred. But the gift is there. My cousin, the King, is full of understanding, but a weak man as to his body ; frail, easily overborne, easily distraught, and unable to bear great trouble. And it is no otherwise with me, as thou seest. I cannot govern a king-

dom, but I can teach thee how to govern one, cousin."

"I have heard," said Palombris, "that the way to begin the governance of a kingdom is to keep silence concerning it."

"Thou art not far from the mark," said the archbishop, drily. He held out his box to Palombris. "It may be a good plan," he said, "to provide thyself with sugar. It is a stay and a comfort in times of trouble, and may often prove to be a great helper to thought when hard matters are to be devised. Moreover, it will in all likelihood supply a lack in thee; for if thou art the son of thy father, thou wilt have many virtues, but not sweetness. I have a box which I will fill and present to thee; and thou shalt accept it as a sign of kinship and love between us."

Palombris thanked him.

"Come to my table often," said the archbishop. "Thou wilt ever be welcome. Keep thine ears open to hear; say little, unless to ask questions; mark such men as I mark, and attend to them. For truly a man may learn more by listening than he can ever tell others by speech."

CHAPTER X. OF THE DAYS OF PALOMBRIS IN BARBIZEN

Now Palombris dwelt at Barbizen with the King's folk. John of the Marches parted from him sadly, for he loved Palombris much, and was loth to lose his company; yet he hoped for great things

to come from the son of Kol of Grebana ; so the one thing paid for the other in his mind as he left Palombris in Barbizen, and returned home to the March Castle.

John had friends in Barbizen, and to these he spoke privily in such wise that they looked on Palombris curiously, and with favour, and promised John that they would advise him of whatsoever outstanding thing might come to pass, so that he might be warned of any need for his presence. But they also said, that if Palombris were such as he deemed, then there was little likelihood of danger for him, for he would make his own way ; to which John answered, that he was pleased to hear them speak so, but desired them to do according to his request. And John of the Marches was a wise man, and fore-seeing ; and many thoughts were in his mind that he did not speak of as then, but afterwards they proved true.

Palombris flourished greatly, and was not long in growing expert in all the duties that belonged to the old King's esquires, and the King soon loved to have him near, whereas he was quiet, and gentle in his ways, and sweet tempered, and modest, and this was what the King most liked in those about him. And therewithal he was silent and not given to telling much of his mind, and yet there seemed always sunshine in his eyes, and warmth wherever he went. A great comfort this was to the old King, and he came soon to trust in Palombris for many things, knowing that Palombris would do his errands wisely, and without babbling

or strife, and that he would have fair words and great patience with fools. So presently it came about that it was mostly Palombris who served the King at table, and carved for him, and handed his cup; and this befell easily and smoothly, because Palombris knew best what the King liked and disliked, and was ever in the right place, and was skilful with his fingers: so the custom grew without being greatly noted at first.

As time went on, the King found other matters wherein Palombris was helpful. There were clerks and other men of letters and learning, to read to the King all parchments and books; but he was slow, and liked to carry away the parchments and books to consult by himself in his cabinet, and thereto he had a large lens of crystal for a reading glass, since his eyesight failed him somewhat. But he found that Palombris could read aloud in a way that pleased him, so often they went away together to the cabinet, and sat there in comfort, the King in his chair, and Palombris on a short stool at his feet, and then Palombris would read as the King wished, slowly in a clear voice that was nothing out of the common for beauty, but yet was sweet and pleasant. They read all manner of things in this way, both mighty papers of state, with huge seals to them, and also poems and tales. The King would often tell Palombris his secret mind about the matters they read of, for he was a man who found silence somewhat hard, and craved for one with whom he might share his thoughts, and he knew that Palombris

would reveal nothing. And when this had gone on some while, it crossed his mind that Palombris might perchance have fancies of his own ; so he began to ask his counsel, and listened intently to the answers that Palombris made. And it seemed to him that they were wise answers ; and he foresaw that Palombris might yet prove a mighty counsellor ; wherefore he guided his steps that way of intent, and took care that Palombris should wit well of many deep secrets.

Palombris said : “ Dear Sir, I know not if it is right that I should be aware of these things.”

“ If I deem it good, let that suffice,” answered the old King. “ And forsooth, thou hast a better right than most men to wit of them, as may some day be clear to thee.”

On such days as the King could spare him, Palombris would sup at the archbishop's table. The archbishop was so frail of health, that he went out little ; yet would he ever sit at the head of his board, and have about him men worth seeing and speaking with, for above all things he loved good converse. And since Palombris could give him news of the King, and moreover was of his own blood kindred, the archbishop would often have him near his own chair.

There Palombris found another sort of man from the kind he saw about the King and the great lords. He saw all manner of men, both of high rank and base born, who rubbed shoulders much on a level ; and sometimes it was a coarse-handed,

bull-necked ploughman's son who wore gold and jewels there, and the nobly born man who waited on him. But whether lay or cleric, noble or base, they were all men of learning, who spoke of other things than horses and falcons, and love and war. They spoke of all things in heaven and earth, from the configuration of the stars to the right tillage of estates; but all was worthy of hearing, and Palombris listened well, and learnt much.

The archbishop gathered to himself whatsoever wisdom he could find; and if any man had a new tale to tell, or a song to sing, or a thesis to dispute, he was fully welcome with the archbishop, and might gain a dinner, and perchance some gift, or helping towards his desire. And whatsoever it was, he and his guests would talk about it. Palombris had no song to sing, nor any tale to tell, and with the disputations he never meddled; but he laid to mind all that he heard, and often he and the archbishop would sit quietly alone, and speak what was in their thoughts.

This was the school of Palombris; for albeit the churchmen of Barbizen lived in no apostolic state, yet never elsewhere did he find such talk as they made, nor so profitable. And the archbishop was a keen man, and when he was alone, he could lay his tongue round a sharp word or two concerning those who had been with him; and Palombris listened, but said little.

He had the psalter chanted every day in his hall, before supper; and this greatly chafed some of his friends, who had no mind to stand for the

quarter of an hour ere the first course was served. But the archbishop would in no wise abate his custom, and said, that if he gave it up, he might as well let his hair grow, and marry a wife. And soon after Palombris came, the archbishop gave him a psalter, and said :

“ This is a book written by a king, and it is a book for kings to read.”

Palombris took it, and saw how finely it was written.

“ Sir,” he said, “ how can I take this ? It is worth an earl’s ransom.”

“ No matter,” answered the archbishop. “ I am now too old to read such small writing. Thou art young, and hast keen sight.”

So Palombris took it, and used to read little bits out of it when he had moments of leisure. He loved the fair writing, and he came in the end to love what was written ; for as the archbishop said, it was a book for kings.

CHAPTER XI. OF THE FRIENDSHIP OF PALOMBRIS AND GIROFLANZ

Now, all this while Palombris had the best of friends in Giroflanz, albeit their friendship went not wholly a straight course. He grew in stature and strength, yet in strength more than in stature, for like Kol he was a short man. None was hardier or more expert, whereas he had been nourished in Greenwood, and not in courts and palaces, and the days with John of the Marches

had not been days of ease. All this while he never forgot Pallogris even for one day, but wore the iron buckle whether upon silk or upon steel.

The King made himself acquainted with all that Palombris did; and they told him that no esquire was so expert and so powerful in essays of arms, or bore himself better in all things; and of him the women said, that none was more courteous, and none meant less by it. And because of all these things, both the men and the women regarded him curiously and somewhat maliciously, and they had faith in him, but liked him not greatly, and in these days did not hate him; but they took most pleasure in plaguing him as far as they dared. In which the old King did not meddle, for he deemed it good for Palombris to find his own bridges, and also he deemed that Palombris would not be helped by him. So in the end all thought well of Palombris, but none could ever divine him, or touch his heart.

Many women there were, who would have rejoiced beyond measure to disturb him, and to draw him after them, and to play with him; but this not one of them could ever do, for their fairest lures were lost on Palombris, who was ever kind and ready, and had the eyes of a child. And as for the men, they had seen the body of Palombris often, and whosoever wished to try him in the essay of arms could feel the strength of it, and they knew well that beneath the silk of his dress was somewhat whereof the women knew little,—namely, great and measured strength,

and a hardy heart that would give in neither to pain nor to weariness. Thus they did not meddle much with him ; withal, some there were that would have given no little if they might but guess what his mind was, and what he hoped to do.

A strange youth was Giroflanz in his eyes, and unlike to himself, although he soon found that others also were unlike him ; for Giroflanz was haughty, and proud, and full of fire, but unstable and indolent of will, so that he began many things and left them off before they were finished, for pure whim and lack of stability. And Giroflanz was the readiest of men with his tongue, and could keep nothing to himself, nor did he ever trouble to that end. There was nothing that he could not do, and nothing that he ever did. And Palombris found that as Giroflanz was, so was all Barbizen in those days, mighty, and able, and courteous, and bright of mind, yet all unstable and weak. Among the great lords, John of the Marches alone had the strong will that in old days had founded and nourished the realm ; but he was laughed at somewhat, and deemed strange in his ways by many, even though he was too powerful to be despised. So Palombris lived and watched, noting and learning the ways of men ; but he never loved fickleness nor lack of diligence, and Giroflanz saw this, and wondered at it a little, and then was minded to think it over-gravè ; and at last, as days went on, he changed his mind again, and looked to Palombris as to one of steadier

light and fiercer flame than himself, even as a woman may sometimes look to a man.

Giroflanz sprang of a mighty house, and a rich, and when he was arrayed for great feasts or days of state he carried an armoury so splendid, that he seemed the fairest and noblest of esquires. Also, he had much money ; albeit no one knew what became thereof, he himself least of all. When he saw that Palombris dressed plainly, and carried no armoury but the King's, he was fain to share all that he had with Palombris. But Palombris would not.

"It is not right," said Giroflanz, "that thou shouldst go plainly dressed."

"Wherefore not ?" demanded Palombris.

"Because it is the duty and the right of all men of nobility to be arrayed in fitting wise," quoth Giroflanz.

"I will only wear what I have won," said Palombris.

Giroflanz said that this was unfriendly, but Palombris denied it, and said again :

"I tell you, Giroflanz, that I will not share with you unless ye will share with me."

Giroflanz said he would do that. So they agreed to put their money into one common purse and part it between them, and Giroflanz was to wear no jewels, and no armoury but his father's badge and the King's. This irked Giroflanz somewhat, but he stayed faithful to that compact.

And so it turned out, that after they had parted the money between them, Giroflanz often had

to borrow from Palombris. And at this he marvelled much, for Palombris never denied a beggar, and ever had money in store wherewith to eke out Giroflanz.

They did many deeds in company, and their friendship was well made; for Giroflanz learnt much from Palombris, although there was much that despite his quickness he could not learn. And Palombris learnt much from him. Giroflanz shewed him the spending of money, whereof Palombris knew nothing; for most keen was Giroflanz in the choice of all things, and could tell the quality of jewels, and the worth of all things, and this he was proud of. But when Palombris had learnt from him, he swiftly outstripped Giroflanz, and shewed a sharper eye, and this he added to it, that he was shrewd at a bargain, and would not pay more than the worth of whatsoever he bought in the cheaping, whereas Giroflanz was easy to outwit, and never measured money.

"I am not a chapman," quoth Giroflanz, when this was said to him.

"Nor art thou a peasant," answered Palombris.

"What of it?" demanded Giroflanz.

"This," said Palombris, "that thou art mighty free with other people's bread. Have a care thereof; for the goose that lays the golden eggs should be kept fat."

"What is wrong with the goose?" said Giroflanz.

"She is not so fat in Barbizen as might well

be," answered Palombris, "and some day I shall see if we may not make an adventure, and feed her."

"How wilt thou do that?" asked Giroflanz.

Said Palombris: "It will be a great adventure, and we may gain great honour; for she pineth away, and her eggs are smaller than heretofore, as I understand. So we may hereafter contrive her rescue from those who distract her, and we will see that she is fed again, and then the eggs may be larger, and there will be more for the King, and perchance some for us."

Giroflanz gazed at him, and then said:

"Why should we meddle therewith?"

"Of a truth," said Palombris, "all the world is on that adventure after the goose: and those who share in it are of two kinds, namely, those wise men who fatten the goose, and love her eggs, so that both they and she are happy and friendly; and those foolish who are fain to slay the goose, if they may perchance find great store of eggs within her."

"Dost thou think, then," quoth Giroflanz, "that foes may break in on us?"

"They have done that ere now," said Palombris. "But true it is, that if they came, we should have little strength to prevail against them; and then where wilt thou be? I am all for the goose-adventure."

Giroflanz did not know whether this were truly jest or earnest; but after a while, he said:

"I can see somewhat of this, Palombris. Yet

I think thou art fond of common folk. I see thee give them pennies by stealth, and thou dost even avow it."

Palombris answered: "Ye wade in too deep waters, Giroflanz. There never was man yet, I deem, who knew surely whether he loveth the common folk for themselves alone, or for the profit of their wealth, or for the glory of God; and neither do I know, yet perchance all these are mingled in it. Only this I will declare, that such a way as I go, went all the mighty kings of old who stablished great realms; for well they knew the tale of the goose, and they nourished it well."

Giroflanz pondered over this talk, and often had it in his mind; and from that day he grew graver. Yet he could not speak to common folk as Palombris did; for in Palombris it was a deep root, and he could talk to them, and rebuke them, and be easy and friendly with them, and share in their thoughts, but to Giroflanz they were as the folk of a foreign land, whose tongue was hard to master. None the less, he said no more against Palombris on that head.

Now once, when Palombris and Giroflanz were departing from the minster, there lay a beggar on the steps, as was the custom; for there they gathered the halt, the maimed, and the blind, and such as could not gain their livelihood, to receive such alms as people would give them. Palombris always gave small coins; but Giroflanz gave by fits and starts, as his fantasies

led him, sometimes much, and sometimes nought at all. Now it was the winter tide, and a cold day, colder in that land than in Greenwood that lay southwards; and the air was dry and clear, and the ground like iron. Frost lay at noon in the shadows of the roofs, and the wind was keen and passing bitter, and that beggar shivered and froze amain.

Palombris said: "Rather would I be dead than so cold as that,"—and straightway he threw to the beggar the warm lined cloak he wore; and he set off running to the palace. Giroflanz ran after him, wondering much as to what this might betoken, but Palombris ran the faster, and when Giroflanz gained the ante-chamber, there was Palombris sitting by the fire, as though nothing out of use and wont had happened.

Then said Giroflanz: "Why didst thou give away thy cloak, Palombris? The King will be angry."

"Tell him, and see what he saith thereon," answered Palombris. "I cannot abide to be cold, nor to see other men cold."

"I deemed thou wert wondrous hardy," said Giroflanz. "At least, so men have reported of thee."

"Cold doth me no harm, truly," quoth Palombris, "for that I am strong and in good health. But I loathe it none the less, and cannot abide it in any wise. I fear cold more than the pain of wounds, or death itself."

Giroflanz considered in his mind.

“Thou art a strange man, Palombris,” said he, “and clean contrary to all others. I should have deemed that since thou hatest cold so greatly, thou wouldst rather have kept the cloak thyself.”

“I am better able to endure cold than is that beggar,” answered Palombris, “and withal I had a fire to run to. Surely, had I not given him that cloak, I had shivered as long as he did.”

Giroflanz bore this in his memory, and on a day he spoke to the King, and told him this tale.

The old King smiled, and said : “I would well that all my esquires had the worth of Palombris. I praise him for that deed ; yet I desire that not too many cloaks may be given away, for I cannot replace them. Better it would be, if every beggar in Barbizen had a warm cloak, but I know not how we may bring it about, till times and days change.”

And some little time after, he said to Palombris :

“Cousin, thou hast been with me well-nigh a twelvemonth, and in that time hast begged of me no boon or favour. I praise this, since it is rare ; but I bid thee to ask one, and whatsoever it is, I grant it beforehand, if it lie within my power.”

“I pray thee send for me a messenger into Greenwood,” said Palombris.

“No more than that ? ” asked the King.

Said Palombris : “It is enough : and if the messenger return not, another, until one can be found able to pass that road and return.”

And all this time Pallogris dwelled far away in Greenwood.

CHAPTER XII. OF THE LETTER THAT PALOMBRIS WROTE FROM BARBIZEN TO PALLOGRIS IN GREENWOOD

Now Palombris would not have a scriptor to write his letter for him, for in Barbizen it was not as it had been in the tower of the Marches. Here men were less of brethren, and were not so well to be trusted: and there was none to whom he cared to say those things which were in his mind to write to Pallogris. So he got for himself a sheet of parchment, and pen and ink, and sealing wax, and sat down to write with his own hand. The parchment was all ready marked out with lines and margins, and at the top thereof he had caused diverse matters to be painted with colours and gold: as a blue bull, and a prince and a princess holding one another's hands, and a picture of Barbizen, with a wall, and towers and roofs showing over the top of the wall: and all round and about these ran a scroll of roses, with leaves and flowers and thorns, marvellously fair to see.

He wrote slowly, and all in capital letters, so that it took a long time to write, but when it was finished, it was easy to read.

He began thus: "Dear playmate, I pray that thou wilt not forget me, for I have not forgotten thee." But after he had gotten thus far, it was a long time ere he got further; for he found so many things to say, that he needed to plan what

he would write, and what he would leave out. So when he had spent a day or two in thought, he went on writing, and wrote : " Be sure of this, that I love thee ; but it is not easy to write down all that I desire to say, and I would much rather meet thee in Greenwood, and talk to thee. But I will relate unto thee all that I can."

Then he wrote : " I am now in Barbizen, and an esquire of the King, who is a good and kind old man, and my kinsman. It is a mighty great place, full of people, and if thou wilt look at the picture I have had painted, it is like that, but much greater. Now, I have seen many lovers in Barbizen, for there are as many as there are young people ; every one is a lover ; yet not as we are. There is much lightness in love, and it is a thing little regarded, and deemed a sport, and an easy thing to be made and broken. This I do not understand. I desire thee to learn to write, and to write me a letter saying whether thou deemest love an easy thing ; also saying whether thou lovest me or not, for this I much desire to know. Now, this I will tell thee : that despite the ease with which they make and break love, I do not perceive them to be happy ; wherefore I think they are seeking for a happiness they know not of, and are pretending to be in love, and attempting it, so that they may perchance see if this time they have found it. But they do not seem to find what they want, for little comes of it all. None the less, there are some who seem to love and be happy.

" This also is true, that those who go about in

this way, seeking for love, and dallying with it, grow worse and less happy. Within a year's space, I perceive them to be less of worth than before, for I observe them closely."

When Palombris had written as far as this, he put down his pen, and thought deeply. He turned over in his mind all that he had seen, and he endeavoured to understand in what way it was, that people grew worse. But although he pondered long, it eluded him. Sure he was, that it came to pass, for he beheld it plainly; yet he knew not why it happened, nor the ways wherein it came to pass. So he thought he would leave this out; and went on to the next matter.

"Playmate, I have a great desire to be in the company of those who are of worth, men upright and wise, and of good heart, for it is more pleasant to be with them than with the contrary kind. Yet they are passing few, and therefore precious. Also, I desire to be truly of their company, and to grow in wisdom and might, that ye may love me more, and find in me that which I shall be glad for you to find. Never shall I have a greater happiness than thy delight in me, if ye perceive me to be of the nature ye would most wish; for when thou art happy, then shall I be. And to become of this kind, I think great steadiness of heart is best, so that one swerveth not from one thing to another, but holdeth on a straight way, being ever the same. Those who run from one love to another, lose all that they were seeking for, but those who are steady, and keep on in one way, hold fast to their

hope and delight. Therefore I shall love thee always ; for as long as I do so I shall have hope of great things that shall come to pass. I do not know what they will be, but I am sure that in thee and through thee I shall find them, or else never.

“ There is no woman here who is as thou art, nor is there any to compare with thee. Many women there are, so fair that it is a wonder to see them ; but I think they lack somewhat. They know not what they want ; nor do any men know what they want, and hence no one can give it them. They have all things save that which makes them desirable ; but what that may be I do not know. I know this of a surety, that all their fairness is empty and undesirable, because they have not that which makes thee as thou art. For thou art the most desirable of all people in the world to me ; there is in thee a fairness fairer than fairness itself, and a sweetness beyond sweetness, and I think I can find out what thou desirest, so if thou art yet of one mind, I will yet attain it for thee ; and great happiness it will be to give it thee.”

He laid down his pen again, when he had written this, and for a long time he studied in his mind. But he could think of nothing, and do nought but see pictures in his heart, of Pallogris sitting in a little cart he made for her, and she with round wide eyes, and carrying a doll. And this seemed to him so pleasant, and so wholly delightful, that he was moved, and could not think, but sat there seeing the picture he had remembered. He also remembered another Pallo-

gris, taller, and slim and dark, who had parted with him in Greenwood, so his mind drifted on to this, and when he awoke from his study, it was as if he had come out of a deep well, so deep he had been within himself; and the chamber he sat in, and Barbizen itself, seemed new, even as to a man who has been long absent, or else asleep.

And it seemed verily to him that he knew what Pallogris wanted, though he could in no wise name it; and if he found it for her, glad she would be, all her life long, and she would grow ever more like herself, and that which he loved in her would wax and become clearer, and daily he would note it, and love her more, and have more delight.

So he rose up, and began to pace to and fro, slowly; for it was near to his thoughts, yet he could not name that thing, whatsoever it might be. He made pictures of them, as a mighty lord and lady; yet it seemed not riches. And then he saw them as a poor knight and his dame, in old threadbare clothes, living in a little tower in some unknown place; yet this did not seem as if it would be unhappy. Then considering how long it took him to write, he sat down and began again to inscribe with his pen.

“Playmate, I do not think I fail greatly as to manhood; for I grow strong, and am well able in arms, and the King is not displeased with my waiting on him. I learn many things here. Only one thing I know not as yet, and that is how I shall find the path that will lead us whither we wish. But I will yet find it; so I wait and have

good hopes. And now I pray thee to tell me what thou art doing, and to remember that all little things will be a pleasure to me ; and tell me if thou desirest aught, that I may send it thee. And lest there be no time to write a letter, tell all thou canst to this man who carryeth it, that he may report the same to me. And if thou needest help, and that sooner than I can give it, I bid thee go to Heron of Wood-Isle in Greenwood, and ask it of him."

And afterwards he sealed the letter, and tied it fast with silk, and sealed the silk ; and he gave it into the hands of the man who was to carry it all the long and perilous way to Greenwood.

He said : " Bear this in mind, that I desire a true tale of all the doings of my kinsfolk ; so ask them how matters go with them, and bring me word ; and know that if thou doest this well, thou shalt be to me a friend to whom I am beholden."

The messenger said : " Lord, I will do as thou sayest ; for I am fain to be of thy friends."

BOOK II.

HERON.



CHAPTER I. HERE IS TOLD OF THE PRIORY IN GREENWOOD

FOR long Pallogris carried about with her the letter that Palombris had written from the March Castle. She kept it in her gown, and oftentimes took it out to look at it. It was her treasure, and she loved the golden initial with which it began, that seemed more beautiful than the sun, and the round seal wherewith it had been sealed, that was more full of magic and wonder than the moon. And the letters in between were like stars to her, and as strange ; for none of them could she read. She would sit for long spaces of time conning over it, and making up for herself what messages were therein ; most sweet messages when she was well and happy, but sad, when days were less good to her. This filled many days with dreams, in which she built many castles of gold, or at least of silver.

But after a while it grew upon her that she should know what was truly in the letter, lest any thing there be, of which it were ill not to be aware. And presently she thought of a fancy that filled her with dread ; namely, that Palombris had asked her for somewhat that he sorely needed, or had written some most urgent desire, and she had taken no heed to find it. This fancy came to her in the night, and she rose up from bed, stricken

with terror and trouble, and sat in the window looking out on the moon-lit wood. Then it seemed to her that she was the worst of all folk in the world, and had betrayed the first trust ever given her ; yea, that this was the dreadful end of all her sweet dreams, that she had herself passed by the open gate, and failed to ask the entry. That was an exceeding dark hour for her, and never did she forget the darkness of it, so that in years to come it lingered in her mind as a warning shadow of evil.

None the less, after she had suffered much torment, she went to sleep again, and did not wake till dawn was creeping in. But then she rose, and dressed herself, scarce daring to look at the letter which lay on her table, with its golden initial shining upwards : for it was a sweet reproach to her, and all the more by reason of its beauty and glittering splendour. And now she began to dread with great fear what might be therein, lest it were worse than she had thought.

While the morning was yet early, she set off through the wood. A narrow path led winding through the thickets, and after she had walked about the half of an hour, or somewhat more, she came to the little house of Sisters that lay beside Isle-Kol. It was built in a wide dale wherein was good grass ; and another mile or twain thence, over the swell of the ridge, lay a house of Brothers, who lived quiet and forgetful lives. Pallogris knew the sisters, albeit it was not often that she came that way, unless some business brought her. They sat in a little refectory, whose boards were

bare, and the tables and benches likewise all bare and hard, and the walls washed with white : none the less, it was a fair place, and to enter it was restful. Pallogris had brought with her some small gifts in a basket, as eggs newly laid and yet warm, and a cheese that she herself had made ; all of which things were welcomed, and taken in good part.

So when the meal was finished, and the sisters had all risen to go about such tasks as they had, Pallogris caused the prioress to tarry, and they sat at the head of the table, and had some speech together.

Of the prioress, this much may be told, that she was of good birth, and well taught, and ruled well. Well featured was she, and her face clear both in form and colour, as though it had been cut out of ivory. Yet her chin was sharp, and bitterness lay in the corners of her mouth.

Pallogris told her how she had feared concerning the letter, and prayed her to read it. The prioress consented readily, for even so small a thing was a change and a pleasure to her, after the sameness of her days. She took the letter, and read it out in a low voice, clear and plain to hear. And in it was no such thing as Pallogris had dreaded, so that she rejoiced for pure gladness of heart, and straightway the world was all made again to her, and happy, but now with the shadow of an old terror lurking behind it.

She reached out her hand to receive the letter back ; but the prioress kept it a while, and said :

“ Doth it seem to thee, Pallogris, that this is a letter good to have ? ”

“Yea,” said Pallogris, “even so it seemeth to me.”

“There are many counts against it,” said the prioress.

“I can think of none,” answered Pallogris. “It is a letter that is a delight to my heart.”

Then the prioress fell silent the least space, and made answer again: “None the less, there are many things to be said against it, and I will name them. Very young art thou, Pallogris, and all unwitting in the ways of the world, and in the manner wherein life shapes itself.”

“That is true,” said Pallogris, “but that is nothing against it or against me.”

“I think otherwise,” said the prioress, “and perchance so presently wilt thou. For it is sure and certain that the first love of youth is passing, and not secure. There never was man or woman who did not grow out of it, and leave it behind as a fantasy, and a flower without root.”

Pallogris had little to say to this; so the prioress continued, and said:

“Hence it will be well if thou settest not thine heart upon this love; for bitter days and grievous wilt thou have, if so thou doest. It will fade and depart, and thou wilt be left grieving, not knowing that this is ever the way such things go.”

Pallogris felt sad, and her eyes grew somewhat larger and rounder; yet she had as then no leisure to settle in her mind what she thought hereof, so she said nothing.

“Moreover,” said the prioress, “it will be of

like sort with the young lord. Men are not oversteady of heart at the best, and in Barbizen he will grow, and find a new heart and mind, and most likely see the mate of them in some other woman, more fit than thou to be the wife of a great lord."

Herein lay the barb for Pallogris, that she had herself feared this; and her heart sank.

"He saith otherwise," said she.

"So hath many another," answered the prioress. "And even if he were more perfect than they, yet it is not for thee to tempt him to be faithful when he may do better for himself by wedding another."

Pallogris felt as if she had looked over the edge of all things; but still she said nothing, and the prioress saw in her only a slim and half-grown maid who meditated.

"I have kept the chief count to the last," said the prioress, "and it is this, that thou art of no great birth. Yea, no one knows thy birth, nor who thy folk were; and of wealth thou hast nought at all. But he is of a very great and proud lineage. It is nought against it that they are now poor. Men of such lineage, if they have but will and ability, shortly restore the fortunes of their house. And thou wilt be left alone, since thou art no match for him."

She gave Pallogris back the letter, and Pallogris received it, and thanked her.

"It is never right," said the prioress, "for a woman to set her heart on any man: thence come many griefs and failures, more than may be

numbered. Take whatsoever cometh to thee, but hope little ; for women's hopes are those that are seldomest fulfilled."

"How cometh that about ?" asked Pallogris.

"It is the nature of things," answered the prioress. "Men are not so made that they may be trusted."

Pallogris thought over this as she went her ways home to Isle-Kol. It went with all her fears, and so was hard to disbelieve : and yet however much she dwelt on it, ever at last she came back to a doubt that could not be cast away ; for she knew Palombris better than the prioress knew him, and she knew that he was very steadfast.

Now, when she came to Isle-Kol, she went in under the shattered gateway into the court. Over beyond, all had fallen, and the trees of Greenwood could be seen ; and of the two sides that stood, one was grown with ivy. Pallogris went up a stair, and entered a door, which had a square lintel. Though she had passed in and out through it for many a year, it never grew old or familiar to her. When she had come into the hall, a fire was burning in the great hearth, and the broad table was set at one end for the morning meal. All was very plain, but sweet and clean, for she herself swept and dusted it each morning, and scattered rushes on the floor, and kept all things in their appointed places. So, in spite of its plainness and simplicity, it seemed a fit place for a lord to dwell in, and a man of a great house.

Ever there the old lord was wont to sit ; and of old Palombris would often be in and out, and this seemed strange and pleasant to remember. But on this morning the old lord was not to be seen, and Pallogris noted it, and suddenly she feared that a change of times and days was about to come.

CHAPTER II. OF THE CHANGE OF TIMES AND DAYS THAT BEFELL PALLOGRIS

So she turned up a narrow ancient stair that led to the room where he slept. It was but a few steps ; and that room also was large, and quiet, and plain in all its furnishing, but somewhat dark. Little there was in it, save here and there an ancient chest, heavy-lidded and clamped with iron ; and at one side, a vast curtained bed, four-square, with carved posts, whereof the hangings had once been blue, and gold threads lingered yet in them, but the pattern was mostly gone.

Pallogris went thither, and drew the curtain, and sat upon the side of the bed.

“ Dear sir,” she said, softly, “ ye are long abed this fine morning. I guessed not that ye would stay here, or I would not have gone away.”

“ Neither did I guess it,” quoth the old lord ; and he seemed grown wondrous feeble, who had been so straight and unbending. “ Thou hast done in all ways well. But I know that I shall not again lightly rise from this bed, neither shall I lie here long. I will have a cup of warm ale, and we will talk together.”

Pallogris warmed the ale, and brought it to him, and he drank. Then he bade her put up the pillows behind him, and he sat there and pondered.

"It has ever been my wish," he said, "to do all things in seemly wise, and especially to depart out of this world with a quiet spirit, giving no trouble, and leaving no tangle behind me; for greatly do I hate unseemliness."

"Assuredly thy wish will be fulfilled then," said Pallogris. "In all things thou art the pattern of right behaviour."

He was pleased at this, and took her hand in his.

"Well should I like to be that," he said, "but no doubt I have done many things wrongly, of which thy sweet and perceiving heart alloweth thee not to take note. Tell me if I did wrong as to my grandson."

Pallogris answered: "If the fruit be any witness to the skill of the husbandman, thou didst do very rightly; for I do not know in what way he could be bettered."

"I meant him well," said he. "I grieve that I may not see him again; yet I will not that he be sent for, but intend to depart quietly, troubling none. But I have somewhat to say to thee that must be said, that matters may end well. I fear it will be dull for thee when I am no longer here. That is one of the things all folk have to face and endure while it lasts. Later on, I think happier times will come to thee."

"I will await them," said Pallogris.

Then he said: "Thou art like to pay a penalty

for the sake of Palombris ; and this is what I wish to speak of, so that afterwards thou mayest not be taken unawares."

"If it be good for him, I am wholly content," she answered.

"Yea," said he, "even so I thought ; but if ye know the reason of it, the burden will be the lighter. Hast thou ever wondered in thine heart concerning our lack of wealth ?"

"I know not that we lacked anything," she said.

"Well, in some ways that is true," said he. "None the less, we have fared hard ; and though ye children never noted it, it was otherwise with me, who was brought up amid riches. In that I kept silence, I did well."

"How did it come about that we fell into poverty ?" asked Pallogris.

"The more part of our tale lieth therein," said he. "War destroyed us ; but that was how thou camest hither."

Then he told her the tale, but not as the old King told it to Palombris, for he saw it differently.

He said : "I am an old man now, but once I was young, and not unknown for the repute of my house. I grieve much that I shall not see my grandson Palombris return, for I have expectation that when he comes, it will be with great honour. Howbeit, I am content enough, knowing that with the will of God his fame is assured. And I need this, to make up to me for the loss of my son Kol, who was of all men the flower and perfect pattern,

save, indeed, that he was somewhat headstrong and regardless of other men's counsels. He married into the royal kindred of Barbizen, wherewith I was not in all ways pleased, for the family was weak, and I feared lest my grandchildren fall off from the excellence of their forefathers. But in this it has gone otherwise than as I feared, for I see that Palombris is of the true breed, and takes after his father's kin as to strength and valour.

“Now, Kol was the Constable of Barbizen, and dwelt at a great castle called Flowery Garth, in the days when this land was overrun. He was caught there, and they took the place over his head, and destroyed it, and of all who were therein he alone escaped alive. That was a black business, for it was thought by some that there was treason in it. I remember well how it was; for it befell on the eve of my birthday, and in the dawn came Kol, unarmed save for his sword, and wounded with such evil wounds that it was a marvel he could journey so far. And he brought with him Palombris and thee, wrapped in a cloak together, babes scarce weaned. He died of his hurts, which was a sore sorrow to me, and not lightly to be got over. Afterwards, the heathen men came this way, and we held the castle against them, till our walls were breached and ruined, and we fled into Greenwood. When they departed, we returned again. Great tales might be told thereof, had I strength and time to tell them.”

“Why didst thou not tell them to us?” she said.

“That was my secret,” he answered. “I knew that I had in my hands the next heir to the realm, and well I understood that there were those who would give much for his life or his custody. But I could trust no man. Now, our land had been so widely ravaged that it fell apart; no man came over the mountains from Barbizen, and we were forgotten and left alone. So I thought it best for us to sit down here and await the manhood of Palombris, and the turn of the seasons. I gathered what remnant of my people I could achieve, and settled them afresh, and kept my own counsel. None of the great men of the realm ever wist that Kol’s son yet lived; and when I sent Palombris to Barbizen, I sent him in such wise that only they who were his friends would know who he was. I wished him to have knowledge of all these things, but not until he should be able to understand them aright; so I desire thee to tell him why I did as I have done.”

“I will tell him,” said Pallogris.

“There is more in it than I have yet related,” said the old lord. “So hearken to me, and lay in mind all I shall say.”

Then he told her all that pertained to his affairs: of the limits of his estate, and his titles, and of the bounds of his own domain, and who owed him service, and what service they owed.

“It is my desire,” he said, “that thou shouldst bear in memory all these things, to the end that they may not be forgotten, but due account rendered. For this estate is no mean one, but old,

and full of possible fruit. I have for a long while past let this tower stay dismantled, and remitted my rent-services, that my people might regain their wealth. But that shall not go on always. The time is coming when the rent-services must be exacted in full, and then my grandson will have somewhat of wealth to rely upon, if he should need it. Yet I have foreseen far ahead. Ere this come to pass, Palombris must return from Barbizen, and the land be more settled."

"I will bear it all in mind," said Pallogris.

"Forget nothing that I have related to thee," quoth the old lord, earnestly. "Know this, moreover, that besides all that I have yet said, I am the lay abbot of the two religious houses which lie beside Isle-Kol. I have the revenues thereof in my hands, albeit it is long since I demanded them. The prior and the prioress hold of me. Now, keep thine own counsel as to this, until my grandson returns; for it is my contention that in default of a fresh appointment my lay abbacy devolves on him as through inheritance. But if it get abroad, his foes may seek to appoint an abbot, and may even escheat the fief on the ground of absence, so that Palombris will have no wealth of his own wherewith to fight his way in the world. Hence, thou must tarry in Isle-Kol for his sake, that when need arises, thou mayst tell him of all these matters. That may not be for some years yet, but the need will surely arise at last."

"I will do all thou biddest," said she.

"Now I will speak of thy kindred," he said.

“Kol told me thereof ere he died. There was a knight, a vavasour of Kol, who was in the castle of Flowery Garth. He had brought his dame and his babe with him, and thou wert put into one nursery with Palombris. And when Kol came for Palombris, he knew not that there were two children in the same bed, but gathered up the sheets by the corners, and carried you both out. But as for the name, I cannot recall it at this present.”

“Then I spring of a house nowise wealthy?” said Pallogris.

“Blood counts more than wealth,” quoth the old lord, “and takes longer to gain. Trouble not thyself on that head: thou wilt pass muster. And now I am going hence to see my son Kol again, who, if I understand religion aright, now doubtless occupies a very worthy and honourable place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Go thou to the sisters, and tarry with them. There is no right shelter for thee here.”

Last of all he said: “Bring to me the prior and prioress, and I will leave them charge concerning thee. And all things shall be settled when my grandson returns.”

Pallogris did as he bade, and he tarried quietly and with great seemliness for six days, and then died so that no one was put to trouble. They gave him interment in the chapel of the priory, for which he left them a rent-service, since that was an ancient and honourable custom.

Pallogris was very sad. But she left the tower, and took up her abode with the sisters henceforward. And this comforted her, that she had once been carried in the same cloak with Palombris.

CHAPTER III. OF PALLOGRIS AT THE PRIORY

PALLOGRIS settled down to live with the sisters in the priory : and this was a great change for her, whereas with the old lord went all the life she had loved. She was sad that he had gone away, and sad that it also had gone ; for it had been to her even as the rising and setting of the sun, and the turn of the seasons, and all had been one together. But now the sun rose and set, and the year turned as before, but a new life began, and all was different, and Pallogris marvelled thereat, and knew not if she walked or dreamed. And it was a long while or ever she found the earth under her feet again.

When Pallogris came to the priory, carrying her little bundle of clothes and treasures, both prior and prioress seemed somewhat unlike what they had seemed before, as though they had shape-changed. The prioress said to her :

“Thou shalt now dwell as we do, Pallogris, and live by the rule we live by ; it is no hard one.”

Pallogris agreed that she would do so.

So the prioress said : “Each of us, when she first came hither, helped and served those who were before her, and studied to learn that fair and

sweet way of life which, when it is attained, is the best of all. So it shall be with thee."

This sounded hopeful to Pallogris, and she thought well of it. So she began very meekly to do such small tasks as she was set. She brought her fowls to the priory, and set up a little house for them, that Palombris had devised aforetime; and she herded the geese, and waited at table, and was glad to do these things, since they were like those she had ever been used to do. She was most whiles glad to be alone, and in her own thoughts.

Most quiet was that life, and one day much like another. All was sweet and fair, and there were many things that were pleasing; and there was ever the wood, when her heart turned that way. But sadly she missed the great fire which the old lord had sat before, and his daily presence. He had been a silent man, yet between him and her had been great likeness of mind, that could be felt, though few words went betwixt them. With the sisters it was not wholly the same. Pallogris understood dimly that their minds went another way than hers. She was slow of speech, and unready with her tongue, and this seemed now as a barrier, which before had been but a silence between those who needed not to speak much. She wandered away into her own thoughts, even as an anchoret wanders away into solitudes and empty places.

None the less, Pallogris set herself to dwell there, and to wait upon the time. It was a great happi-

ness that she had the letter of Palombris. Each time she looked at it, her heart rose, for she remembered that adventure and valour were afoot, and that not for ever and a day would the world be empty. And ere he came back again, she had much to do, and had to bear in mind all that the old lord had told her.

On a day, Pallogris said to the prioress : “ Ere much time has passed, it will be fitting that I should learn to read.”

“ Little haste about that,” said the prioress.

“ I should also like to weave and embroider,” said Pallogris.

Said the prioress : “ In good time, if ye shew a skill that way.”

Time wore on, and it seemed many days nearer the time when Palombris would return ; so Pallogris returned afresh to the matter.

She said : “ When shall I learn to shape letters ? ”

“ Most whiles,” answered the prioress, “ we take what our governors appoint for us. Art thou weary of thy fowls ? ”

“ Nay,” said Pallogris, “ but some things will be fitting for me to learn.”

“ I shall judge when that time comes,” said the prioress.

So Pallogris tended her fowls, and had many small chickens that ran after her, which was a great happiness ; albeit she wept when any were taken from her to be eaten.

Said the prioress : “ Thou art happy enough

doing these things : I do not think learning will better thee. And moreover, there is no call that thou shouldst be taught those matters which befit only the great and wealthy."

Pallogris was as far off as ever from learning those arts which she desired ; and when Palombris came back, he would find her still tending fowls, and he would think she had been neglectful. Then it began to stir in her mind that perchance the prioress would not wish her to learn any arts, so that she would never learn them. And when this grew upon her a little, her thoughts went along new ways, and she wondered deeply, day by day, without being wholly sure whither she tended.

CHAPTER IV. HOW ANDREAS BROUGHT A LETTER TO PALLOGRIS

It befell one day that Pallogris came into a dreamy mood, and her footsteps wandered out of Isle-Kol, and carried her along the wood-path ; withal, she scarce knew where she went, or why. But she wandered on, with the thick wood on either side, and the overgrown path before her ; and it was spring that day, all sudden and marvellous, for after many days of cloud and rain, while the earth seemed to wait and be unsure of the time of year, that morning had dawned fair, and seen a wresting away of clouds, and a gleaming forth of blue sky, and a glow of sunshine, and all the buds were unfolding, and all the grass was green. So

Pallogris wandered on, half thinking that on this morning something would happen to her ; for in some way it seemed like enough that when all things were hopeful and coming into their growth, she would not be left out.

Now the way she went in this manner was the way she had gone with Palombris ; and when she came to the place where they had parted, she remembered this, and stood there glad in her remembrance of him, yet sorrowful for that he was not there. Only a little while she stood, dwelling with her eyes upon the green of the grass and the springing underbrake that was so fair in her eyes, and so good to see ; and then her heart leaped for joy and terror, for she saw afar off a man riding. A huge man, he seemed, mounted on a strong roan horse, and armed well, for he wore a spreading steel salet on his head, and at his saddle was strapped a long sword. He bade to have come far, by his looks.

When he came near, he saw her, and turned his horse across the way, and bent to regard her. A pale and very keen face peeped under the salet, thin-lipped and sharp of chin, but she thought it a good face.

He said to her : " Tell me if I draw near to Isle-Kol, for I have understood that it is hereabouts."

" It is not very far hence," she answered. " But it is so rare that any stranger cometh hither, that I think you go on some errand."

" That is true," he said. " I come from Bar-bizen, and I bear letters."

When she heard this, her heart beat fast for joy, and she said to him : " If perchance one is for me, give it to me now."

So he asked her name, and searched in his wallet, and gave her the close-rolled scrip which Palombris had himself written and sealed. But he regarded her longer, and said : " I was bidden and commanded to ask many questions, and carry back a true word of all that was told to me. So if this letter is for you, demoiselle, tell me somewhat which I may carry back."

" Light down off thy horse, then," she answered ; " for when ye come to Isle-Kol, ye will be welcomed, and ye will not again have such leisure to speak to me."

Thereupon he alighted down, and took off his salet, and they sat upon the bole of a fallen tree, not far from one another, so that they might speak.

" I think," said Pallogris, watching him, " that thou wert meant to tell news as well as to receive it. What is thy name ? "

He answered : " I am called Andreas."

Pallogris said : " Art thou a knight ? " But when she looked down at his feet, they were not spurred with gold, and she saw that she had made error, and was sorry.

This saw Andreas. " I am but an esquire yet," he said, " though my hair begins to grey somewhat, and many men of my age are long since made knights, and more ; but that is because they need not my kind of man in Barbizen. I am good at holding on, but not at gifts and graces."

"That is ill news," she said.

"This thou sayest of courtesy," he answered.

"Nay," quoth Pallogris, "I say it because I would bid luck for all men and women."

He coloured a little, and smiled, and yet he could not have told wherein lay the charm that drew him ; but him-seemed that in her was great love of all things, so that none was of little moment to her. Pallogris said again :

"And there is more than that. If I bid luck for all, I shall have my share ; but if only for some, perchance I may be left out. And when one has tried it, lo, it is happier to wish well to all things, even though it cometh not to them."

He assented. Then he said : "I deem there is magic therein, for it may well be that every blessing is in the way of being a spell ; and if those who are blessed are unworthy to receive what is bidden for them, the good thing cometh straightway to those who bade it."

"It is so likewise with curses," said Pallogris. "And I had yet another reason : for if it be as thou sayest in Barbizen, how shall Palombris ever win his way ?"

"O," said Andreas, "he will do that well enough ; for he hath great power of doing whatsoever he setteth his mind upon, and therewith he is apt at courtesy, and is of high birth. A man who might pick and choose among women at his own will, and who is of the King's kindred, will never lack success."

She sighed a little. "How is it with him ?" she asked.

Andreas answered : " All folk deem him of the utmost promise ; and the King sheweth him favour, and hath him as esquire. So all will turn out well for him in time."

She said : " And what is against him ? For ever is there something against every man."

He considered a while. " Thou sayest truly," said he. " Ever there is something against every man : though it is not always clearly to be seen what it is. This I will say : he is deemed silent as to his own heart, wherefore some look on him with doubt, because those who keep silence may be judged to have thoughts worth holding secret. And he is of strong will, and young ; and the danger there is ever that he may wake suddenly, and set his heart on a woman, and that woman the wrong one. I have seen this come to pass. Of all errors it is the hardest to retrieve."

Pallogris answered : " Sometimes it is an error no man would wish to retrieve ; and the woman still less."

" Well," said Andreas, " it may be so ; but such men and women are rare in Barbizen."

" Tell me of Barbizen," she said. " Is it not a mighty realm, but weak ? "

" It lacks men who make errors for love," said Andreas. " And that may come to the same thing." But he told her the way he had come, and of adventures in the Debateable Wood, and of the hills and the river, and the road through Greenwood, and the perils by the way. And after that he told her of Barbizen, and of what came to pass

there. A long time they sat, thus talking. But when they drew to the end of their speech, Pallogris said : " Carry this message, I pray thee, and forget none of it. Tell him that Pallogris is in good health, and no otherwise than as he left her ; and say that the old lord, his grandsire, is now dead, and Pallogris dwelleth with the sisters in the priory. And say this : that what he gave me to keep, I keep, and am fain to give him back, when the due time comes, increased and not diminished."

Andreas listened attentively, and said this over again, word for word.

" I will carry that message without fault or fail," he said. He found his horse, and gathered the reins, and mounted, and turned about ; and all this time he seemed pensive. But he brightened up anon, and saluted Pallogris, and rode towards Isle-Kol.

After he had done his errands, Andreas found his way safely back through the Wood Debateable, and carried to Palombris the message Pallogris had given him ; and a true tale of much beside. Palombris sat in a chair, with head down-bent as if in deep study, while he listened. He had one foot set against the edge of a table, and the other foot he kicked to and fro. He heard all that Andreas had to tell, and noted it ; but his questions ran chiefly on Pallogris, albeit he asked concerning all others.

" How did the prioress seem to thee ? " he demanded.

"Lord," said Andreas, "she is one of those who deem the grapes sour."

Palombris smiled. "How dost thou know that?" asked he.

"I have seen the kind before," said Andreas. "I, for my part, have had few grapes for my share, but I know that they are sweet, for all that."

"If luck comes my way, thou shalt try them," said Palombris. "But keep thine own counsel about it."

Andreas thanked him.

But after Andreas had departed, Palombris sat for long, considering deep in his mind; for him-seemed the time drew near when he must accomplish more than he had as yet done.

CHAPTER V. NOW PALLOGRIS THINKS SHE WILL GO TO BARBIZEN

Now, when Pallogris turned her steps that day back towards Isle-Kol, joy was so fair in her heart that nothing troubled her. She had the letter in the breast of her gown, and as she walked, she took it out at odd whiles, to gaze upon it. So in due time she crossed the broad green slope of the vale, and came among the outbuildings of the priory, and a copse wherein her fowls wandered. Here she tarried, so that she might think upon all that Andreas had told her, and delight in it. She put the letter in her lap, and often gazed upon it and held it in her hand. But she would not open it, for that was a pleasure she would fain linger over.

Then between her meditations there rose thoughts, that seemed to grow of themselves. It seemed to her that she might not give that letter into other hands, to be read ; this was in all ways forbidden. And well she knew that she herself could not encompass to read it. Thereupon she wondered greatly as to what lay before her. As soon as she held the letter in her hand, and gazed upon it, this much grew suddenly clear to her, that never would she attain what was written therein, save the prioress taught her to read. Forthwith there grew another thought in the mind of Pallogris, and she said to herself :

“ I have not sought pride, for I take no joy therein ; but my chief pleasure lies in tending my fowls. Yet if pride be good for the sake of others, it may be well that I should tread that path.”

This seemed to her marvellously clear, although she knew not at all how she had come to that surety ; but now she rose up, and put the letter away where no eye could see it, and went her ways towards the priory.

Pallogris served their table at supper. Nought befel that was out of the way. But when the board was clear, the prioress bade her tarry, and said to her :

“ Pallogris, where wert thou this long afternoon ? ”

“ I wandered about in the wood, as my custom is,” answered she.

“ That is not wholly a good custom,” said the prioress.

"I have followed it since I could first walk," answered Pallogris.

"Well," said the prioress, "I think it should change now. We are not so quiet here as was formerly the case; for to-day a man journeyed through the wood from Barbizen, and we know not how often such men may come, nor when, nor who they will be."

"I do not think they will harm me," said Pallogris.

"That may be so," answered the prioress, "but it hath other points to it than only that. All of you lie in my hands, and I must answer for you all. Now, we make rules so that we may save trouble and doubt, for although what is needful for one is not needful for another, yet we know what is expedient for all, even if not for each. Therefore do not go widely into the wood, but keep to those parts of the meads which are near to our house."

"I shall not be happy if I may not go into the wood," said Pallogris.

"Thou wilt fall into the way of it," answered the prioress. "Have trust that I know what is best."

But Pallogris was sad, for now she would not again be able to meet those messengers.

On the morrow came the prior, walking across the hill. He was a mild man, and reputed to be somewhat of a wool-gatherer, but well-liked. He sat apart with the prioress, and they talked together. They sat with folded hands and eyes downcast; but they talked long, for all that.

Pallogris could see him as he sat in the porch, in his long gown of grey, as though he were made of silver.

When he had gone, the prioress called Pallogris to her, and said :

“Something has come into my mind. It may be that when thou wert in the wood yesterday, thou and the messenger met together.”

“It might be so,” answered Pallogris.

“Did he give thee a letter from the young lord ?” asked the prioress.

“Truly he did so,” said Pallogris.

“Why didst thou not show it to me ?” asked the prioress.

Said Pallogris : “I did not think he would wish me to show it.”

“That is nothing to the point,” answered the prioress. “While thou art here, thou art in my hand, and it beseemeth not for thee to have letters from a man, nor to concern thyself with such things.”

“What he desires carries weight in Isle-Kol,” said Pallogris, “since he is lord here.”

“Doubtless,” answered the prioress. “But how shall I rule this priory, if those under me have letters, and show them not to me ? For if it should happen, that thou driftest away into foolish thoughts, that will be at my door withal.”

Pallogris said : “It is not possible that thou shouldst answer for my thoughts.”

“Tell me this,” said the prioress. “Why didst thou bring me a former letter to read, when the old lord was well able to read it for thee ?”

Pallogris coloured, and answered: "He never required to see it, but was content to give it me. If thou wilt do the like, I shall be content."

"I cannot promise that," said the prioress.

So Pallogris answered: "Neither will I promise to render to thee any letters I have, until I may first know what is in them."

"That is not right," said the prioress. "It is clean against all our rule. I know that I do wisely; and this much I am sure of, that all letters coming hither shall go under my eye ere any of you have them. Moreover, I think it a great folly that thou shouldst set thine heart on the young lord, who is far above thee."

"He may require account thereof, when he returns," answered Pallogris.

"I will give it him," quoth the prioress, sharply. "He is not the only man to be thought of. And until we come to agreement in the matter, certainly thou shalt not learn to read."

Said Pallogris: "When the old lord bade me tarry here, it was as a guest."

"I did not so understand it," answered the prioress. "Thou hast neither rank nor wealth, but art a foolish girl, obstinate, and knowing nothing. Thou shalt neither go into the wood, nor learn to read, until thou hast acquired obedience."

So the matter rested at this point.

When the prior heard of it, he was sorry, also somewhat puzzled.

"If she desireth learning," he said, "it might be well to give it her; for those who love it are few."

"I will not give way," answered the prioress. "It is not right that young maidens should wander about in the wood, and receive letters secretly; and this thou knowest as well as I do. All here are my children, of whom I must render account."

The prior saw nothing to say against that; but he pursued his own thoughts, such as they were, and answered: "Perchance ye went the wrong way about it, sister; she would have understood better if ye had spoken more softly."

"I am the best judge thereof," said the prioress, "and no one but I shall judge. And how could I have spoken more softly?"

The prior had no answer to this, for he knew not.

"Thou art a man all over," said the prioress; "ever searching about for some excuse for a woman."

"Not so," quoth the prior, colouring; but he thought it best to let the matter drop. He raised another question in its place.

"It will be a great error," he said, "if it should turn out that ye have put her below her right station."

"I am safe enough on that point," answered the prioress. And the end of it was, that the more the prior leaned one way, the more the prioress leaned to the other. So he gave it up, lest he do harm rather than good.

Pallogris wept secretly, but nursed her letter, and was comforted thereby. But all the sisters knew well that she was fallen out of grace, and

they regarded her sadly, and Pallogris was most unhappy. Moreover, her fowls were given to another, whom they knew not, and Pallogris was set to scrub and clean, and did not go out at all.

Pallogris meditated as she scrubbed, and sometimes her tears fell into the pail, and helped in the cleansing. At whiles she thought that this might be a punishment for deeming it right to be proud; and then she was deeply troubled in heart. But the more she meditated, the clearer it seemed to grow, that she could no longer do as the old lord had bidden her, for she could not tell what might be toward, and could help or hinder nothing. So what with one thing and the other, she was sure that they had sent away to Barbizen, to ask for an abbot and abbess, so that when need came to Palombris, he would have no wealth, and could never come back to her, nor fight his way. Even it might be, that some word concerning this lay hidden in his letter.

So after a week had passed, Pallogris emptied her pail one morning in the little paved court, and some of her tears flowed away with the water. And suddenly she saw the wood, and remembered that Barbizen lay beyond it, and Palombris was there: and it was summertide, and warm. And then she left the pail where it stood, and crossed the greensward, and entered the wood; she knew not whither she went, save that she would go to Palombris in Barbizen, and tell him of the abbot and abbess.

In this wise Pallogris also set out for Barbizen.

CHAPTER VI. OF THE SHEEP-FOLDS OF WOOD-ISLE

PALLOGRIS walked a long way, until night began to fall. She loved the wood, and was not fearful of any thing in it ; but she had forgotten that it would have been wise to bring a cloak and food. She was exceeding hungry, and ate berries and nuts ; but they were unripe, and not good to eat. Also she was cold, for the wood fell somewhat chill at night. She tore up dry old bracken, and crept under it, and after a while went to sleep.

She slept well, but in the morning she was very cold, and hungrier than before. She set off to walk to Barbizen, and walked all she could, so that the way might be shorter. And it was a help to her that Palombris had passed along this road, and seen all the things she saw ; though indeed, he had had a warm cloak, and a wallet full of good things to eat.

But after noon had passed, and the light had mellowed, and the shadows grew longer Pallogris sat down very sadly, for it seemed a great way to Barbizen, and she could go no further, because of her exceeding hunger, which made all her limbs weak, and her heart fail her. None the more would she go back to the priory ; but she sat there, wondering what would come to pass.

She saw a bear come out of the thickets ; he stood gazing upon her. A great rout of flies followed him, for his mouth was dripping with honey, and in his hands he carried a honeycomb.

He brushed away the flies, but they came again eagerly. Then he saw Pallogris, and dropped the honeycomb, and lumbered over the road into the brake, leaving the honeycomb behind; but all the flies followed him save a few. Pallogris ran and got the honeycomb, and ate it gladly, and good it was. She felt better, and thought it time to go on towards Barbizen.

Now the bear looked out of his covert, as though he were minded to follow Pallogris. So she fled on swiftly, walking as she might, and the bear came after. He came not over close, but kept twenty paces or so behind, and Pallogris made great speed, all breathless.

After a while she saw where a side path led out of the road, and she fled along it, and the bear followed. A mile or twain through the wood there was an edge to the woodland, and beyond it was green smiling country, ridge upon ridge, rounded hills and grassy valleys. It was as if she had come through a door, and strayed into the open air, for it was all bright and clear, and great glittering clouds floated in the blue sky.

So Pallogris went through the wood till she came to the edges aforesaid; and there the path ran out of the forest and brake over clear green sward, green as emerald. Many sheep were on the sward, and a large grey dog that looked at Pallogris with questioning eyes. But when he saw the bear, he began to bark, and all the sheep turned and ran away into a crowd, those who were furthest away making haste to join them. So they gathered from

all quarters, and the dog stood and barked, and the bear came no further, being somewhat puzzled.

Straightway came a tall man, with an iron-shod staff in his hand : and when the bear saw this, he hastened back into the wood. After some while the man came back, and saw Pallogris, where she stayed close by the sheep.

“Ho,” said he, cheerfully enough, “I have gained a new sheep this day, and one that is not common hereabouts.” Then he looked upon her with keen eyes, and said again : “Whence hast thou sprung, demoiselle ?—for I have half a thought that luck has served us both well in bringing thee here.”

Said Pallogris : “The bear pursued me, and I fled hither, not knowing where I went.”

“Tell me of that,” said he.

He was a man rather tall, and well built, but lean and bony. His eyes were grey, and his glance was shrewd and sharp. It was a good face, as of a man given to quiet days and much thinking ; and his beard forked at the end, and was fast turning white.

Pallogris told him about the bear, and how she was minded to go to Barbizen.

“What,” said he, “and how wilt thou do that journey ?”

“I know not,” quoth Pallogris dolorously.

The man was silent a space, and seemed to fall into a study ; somewhat grave he looked.

Then he said : “Where is thy scrip and thy journey-fare ? For those who go on long roads go well appointed.”

Said Pallogris : " Indeed, I have none ; I ran away without thinking thereof."

He regarded her, and there was great friendship and compassion in those grey eyes of his.

" It is not long," said he, " as we count time here, since another came by to Barbizen."

" That will have been Palombris," said she, eagerly.

" I am not in all ways easy in my mind," said he, " for I fear that I have been remiss, and have broken my solemn promise. I am Heron of Wood-Isle, and this is Wood-Isle all around thee ; a great land and a rich. It may be that Palombris spoke of me."

" Nay," quoth Pallogris.

He said : " When the young lord set forth for Barbizen, demoiselle, he guested a night under my roof at Wood-Isle. Well we liked him ; and he set a charge on me, that I should have regard to thee, and be as much of a stay to thee as I might. But while the old lord yet lived, I did not deem myself called upon to meddle with matters that went well enough without me. Once or twice a year I journey to Isle-Kol on my own business, for I am a great sheep owner, and my wool sells for a good price, as much of it as I see my way to part with. There I asked after Pallogris, but they said that all went on as usual with her. So I held my peace, since there was no call to push myself forward. But now the matter comes round in my thoughts again, and I fear I have failed somewhat herein."

Pallogris thought well of him, for Heron was a goodly man to look upon.

She answered: "I cannot say that there is aught I need; but when I know thee better, it may chance that in thee I find a friend, which is the best thing of all."

"Demoiselle," said he, "ye pay me great honour in saying this; for I know without mistake that whom the little lord loves, must be even as he is."

She was glad, and smiled, and prayed him to tell her all he knew of Palombris. So he told her of the night's guesting in Wood-Isle, and of the speech that then befell between them. This was a delight to Pallogris, and long they spent over it. And when she grew to be assured in her mind, she told him of all that had befallen her.

Then said Heron: "Now, hearken to me. It is plain that thou needest a friend to take thy part, and give thee counsel now and again. Thou shalt tarry in Wood-Isle a space, and my women-folk will give thee good welcome. I will go to Isle-Kol to-morrow, and speak with the prioress, and settle matters with her."

Pallogris yea-said this.

So Heron showed her Wood-Isle, that was his land: "And now," said he, "while thou dwellest here, and at all times, it shall be thine, to go where thou wilt."

The edges of the wood crept round this land both on the north and on the south, and presently met again beyond it; but Wood-Isle was a whole day's

journey from one end to another, by the shortest compass ; and not many people had been so far as to go much beyond its border, and few had any desire to do so. That was a sheep land, full of rounded hills and grassy dales, mostly dry, but sometimes with a small stream ; it was never greatly broken up for tillage, but many sheep fed there, and on any morning or evening their flocks might be seen far off, wandering over the green slopes, with some rough carle to watch them. And as for what grew there, it was but furze and gorse, and a stray hawthorn tree, unless it were grass.

Yet that land was rich ; wealthy and well-beseen were the folk who dwelt in it. They sold wool, and mutton, and bought corn ; they had red cows and white, and milk and cheese and cream ; and they kept the best for themselves, until the wool they wove for their garments, and the milk they drank, seemed to sweeten them throughout. They were famed for the softness and whiteness of their skin, and also for a wisdom and steadiness of mind that was free from sadness and from strife.

Yet it may be that this sprang as much from the beauty of Wood-Isle as from aught else, for it was a place the sun loved. The grassy hills lay high up above the level of the woodlands, and caught the sunshine in all seasons of the year ; and there it lingered, touching blade and leaf more softly than elsewhere, so that nothing withered from heat in summertide, and in winter there was always light ; and the mist was not the cold,

lingering haze that clung to the wood, but bold and cloudlike, wandering over the hills till it drifted away, or broke in rain. In Wood-Isle one might lie on the grass and see the glittering clouds come up over the wood, and descend and hover on the ground, till it was easy to think that some part of the fair unknown things that live in the silver of the sky had come down, and would be walking in Wood-Isle. The colour of the land was as jewel work withal; for never was grass greener, or furze darker, or the wild flowers wilder in beauty, or the sky bluer; and the clouds were of gold and silver, and purple and blue, and of rose and russet, and many more colours beside. Heron loved his land; and all of it was his.

Here where Pallogris stood, Wood-Isle began, and not far off, but near to hand over the stretch of green sward, rose up the first long steep ridge, that seemed as if of emerald, and the little scarps of chalk here and there looked to be of inlaid ivory; and overhead on that summer day glowed a sky like turquoise for clearness and brightness, and like sapphire for splendour of light. When she had followed Heron a little way over the green sward, towards the foot of the hill, she came to a narrow white path, and presently she followed it as it ran up and along the steep; and then she saw a garth of hurdles, and a white house with byre and store thereby; and soon they came to it.

A path of stone led from the garth gate to the door of the stead, and all the doors were wide

open. No one was there ; so Heron bade her sit upon a wooden block by the door, that had once been the stump of a mighty tree. She sat there, and watched.

Afar off, along the further steep, she saw white specks moving ; and anon they all ran together, and began to journey along the hill. These were sheep ; but for long she wondered what they might be, for all these things were strange to her. And then, just beyond the hurdle fence, the hill sloped fast down to the valley, and therein ran a brook whose banks were lined with forget-me-not, and bordered with furze mingled with wild rose bushes. All was most still, for here the sound of Greenwood was silent, and nought could be heard save the faint sheep-bells that came drifting across the valley.

But when she had sat there awhile, she saw a woman who came across the garth ; a fair woman, with skin wondrous white and sweet, yet she was well on in years ; and she had blue eyes, and was nobly built and shapely. Pallogris rose up to meet her, but she came to Pallogris, and kissed her, and bade her welcome. And with that, a new day began for Pallogris, for with Agatha came into her heart the breath of courage and safety, and peace and contentment that ever go with them.

CHAPTER VII. OF HERON OF WOOD-ISLE

It was darkening to dusk ere Heron came in, and they lit candles and sat down to the evening meal.

Through the window, Pallogris perceived Wood-Isle grow a wondrous blue, as though all the air were turned sapphire, and a great star twinkled.

Heron seemed a nobler man yet in his own house, and at his own board ; and a goodly house it was, albeit widely unlike aught that Pallogris had seen before, for in it all was wealthy and well-beseen, and nought was stinted, yet nothing there was that seemed in any wise out of the way.

Heron told them of his day's faring, and what had come to pass therein ; a strange tale, Pallogris thought, and full of things she had never heard of before. She listened, looking from one to the other, thinking it marvellous that they should be old, and yet all their youth plain to see ; for the more she looked at Agatha, the younger did Agatha seem, and it was easy to know what she had been like when a maid of the age of Pallogris. Yea, and soon it seemed as if she and Heron had in some way walked out of their age, and become young again ; and Pallogris woke as from a dream, and saw that they were as she knew them. Yet still it was in her mind that this was but seeming, and that in truth they were young, and wondrous fair and fresh to behold, and beautiful in all things.

Heron said : " It may be that thou art conning over some thing better than these tales of mine."

When Pallogris told him of what she had been thinking, he laughed a little and answered : " Well, I would that it should be so, and perchance it is verily so. And wouldst thou not desire that presently the same should be told of thee ? "

"I am not sure," said Pallogris, "that if my youth were seen, it would be as good as yours."

"Well," he said, "that is less to the point than thou mightest think, for true it is, that the youth of any man or woman is hard to fix. Some there be, who have their youth when young, but some wait for it, and attain it when years are somewhat on with them. But none the less, the time of their ripeness and happiness, when they find themselves, and know why they were born, is the time of their true youth, no matter when it chanceth."

"It departeth again," said Pallogris.

"Not unless it be turned from the door," quoth Heron. "That is a divine and a God-given time, the very crown and flowering of life; and it is not given to hold for a little and then let go, but to keep always. So when thou seest those who shared that youth, lo, there it is, and it has not gone from them."

Pallogris looked at him very attentively, yet wondering much.

She said: "I will tell you how it seems to me. We shrink from believing some things, because they are too good to be true; and we fear to put faith in that which may prove to be a broken reed, and pierce the hand that leaneth on it; for then it is a greater sorrow than if we had never set faith on it at all."

"True," said Heron, "yet those who set their faith on it are not disappointed. For didst thou not perceive it with thine own eyes?"

Pallogris assented, but answered: "It may be

so with some, who are chosen and favoured beyond others ; but is it not true, that one expecteth to be among those who are not so favoured ? ”

“ Nay,” said Heron, “ I do not call to mind that I ever had any such expectation.”

Pallogris was silent.

Then said Agatha : “ Thou art a man, Heron.”

“ What of it ? ” said he, smiling.

She said : “ A man expects the best to happen, and goes forth confidently to gain it ; but a woman waits for it to come to her, since wait she must, and she is not sure that it will ever come.”

“ Well,” answered Heron, “ it does not seem to me that one man is favoured more than another ; nor do I know that any favour or fear is to be seen in the way luck is shared out. Rather I would say this, that at whiles the worst of luck may win through and prove to be good, but the best of luck may be a trap for fools, to winnow them out from the wise men.”

“ Thou art making an entanglement of words, Heron,” said Agatha.

“ Well, I can unravel it,” said he. “ There are no unfavoured men or women ; for mark me, God is fonder even than men are of the far-seen, the entangled thing that seemeth without beginning or end, but which will ravel out clear and plain if ye have craft and patience to work at it. And forsooth, to some the tangle is great ; but whether great or small, of a surety it will come out clear in the end. And whatsoever happens to me, straightway I regard it, and suspect it, and test it to see

where it comes into the plot ; and most whiles it comes in somewhere, but if it does not, then I guess that it belongs to a part not yet before me. Hence it comes about, that I expect nothing, for I know not what strange turn things will take next ; but this I will stake high upon, that whatsoever cometh to pass, it is meant for good and not for evil."

Pallogris regarded him, still attentively.

"Thou knowest, Heron," said Agatha, "that people most commonly care little about the great good that shall come to them in the end. They desire the thing they have set their hearts on here and now."

"Hearken," quoth Heron. "All the flocks of Wood-Isle are mine ; I do not know their number. I am a great man for sheep. And all my days are spent in strife with them, inasmuch as they have not the understanding to obey my will and guidance. They want the fresh grass, and I know where it is ; so their desire and mine are at one thereon. But ever they run elsewhere, and get into thickets, and fall into brooks, and tumble down scaurs ; and thither they shall not go for me. I hale them forth, willy-nilly, howsoever much they make their complaint, and I set them going on the way they should go. Of this I think often ; so I waste no sorrow on those men who will have only the thing they have set their hearts on."

"It is not so easy to give up what we most desire," said Pallogris ; for when she thought of Palombris, she knew that nothing would turn her heart away from desiring him.

"I have not said thou shouldst do so," answered Heron. "How could I get my sheep to pasture, if they desired no grass? The trouble is, that they will not go the right way to it. But I am a hard-hearted man where sheep are in question. Go they shall, but my way, not theirs."

Pallogris smiled, for she perceived his meaning; and her very heart shook, if it should prove that a greater happiness was to be hers than she had dreamed of.

"I know not how it is," she said. "Thy words are not as other folk's words; nor are ye as other people. Ye tell me things that make my heart glow within me. How is this?"

"Because I have truly loved my life," said Heron. "I fear lest any good thing escape me, and I am minded to seize all I may. And I will not that any fear or folly come between me and that happiness; so I pay out the thread of my life and deeds, watching with care that I do wisely. But some there are, who care not for what is true, but nurse a private quarrel with their life. Pay no heed to them; they are fools. As for us, let us watch well what we do."

Pallogris said: "Though we are far apart, I see that Palombris is still with me; for he has brought me to you."

"I will show thee many things," said Heron. "Thou shalt watch the sheep gathering, and thou shalt sit by, and see the sheep washing and the sheep shearing, and the craft of wool making; wherein is great disport to be had."

CHAPTER VIII. HERE IS TOLD OF HAWK AND THE PRIORESS

EARLY the next morning, ere the sun had got clear of the hills, Heron rode to Isle-Kol. But when he came to the side path that led away to Sun-Isle, there was Hawk standing by the road. They were not over-great friends ; but when few people dwell together, those have to be friendly who else would not be.

After they had given one another greeting, Hawk said : " How is it that thou art going to Isle-Kol ? Is aught wrong with thy sheep ? "

" Nay," said Heron, " I should look for little help thence, if it were so."

He passed the matter over as well as he could. But Hawk thought more than once about it, and shook his head many times.

At Isle-Kol, Heron sought out the prioress, and begged speech of her. He told her how he had found Pallogris in the wood. The prioress was easier in mind when she knew that Pallogris was safe, for a great trouble and to-do they had had over that matter ; and now the prioress veered somewhat towards anger.

" Why didst thou not bring her back ? " she asked.

Heron said that he thought she would be best with him for some while. " When she has rested," said he, " I will bring her over."

" She was put under my care," quoth the prioress, liking this little enough, " and I think I have the most to say herein."

"Be not too hasty, prioress," answered Heron. "I deem the matter needs some talking over between us."

"Thou hast no finger in that pie," said the prioress. "Let her come back forthwith."

But Heron was not to be put off so easily; and he sat long with the prioress, and when they had finished their talk, matters were going another way than the prioress had looked for.

"Ye have the shoe much on the wrong foot," said Heron, "and for you it will not wear so well as ye think. Prudence will break no bones. The maid must not be put to tasks she loathes, nor to be hurt in heart; for if ye do this, there will be a long score to pay when the young lord returns."

"That will not be to-morrow," said the prioress.

"Then it will be to-day," answered Heron. "I give you good counsel. There have been foolish virgins ere now who misreckoned as to when the bridegroom cometh."

The prioress was exceeding discontent, and laid it all at Heron's door.

Heron cared little for that, if he might but get his way; and even so he got it.

"Whether the young lord returneth or no," he said, "it is not right that ye should act hastily and harshly. The maid can be guided with a straw, so gentle is she; but she is like many another of her kind, in that she will go awry if ye push too hard. Now, when she comes back to you, she will come peacefully, ready to dwell in amity; and ye will have no hard task. Moreover, I

counsel you to teach her all the arts she craveth to learn. For if matters go wrong, I shall take a hand in them myself, to put them right."

So in the end they agreed that it should be as he counselled.

"Yet," said the prioress, "I do not love to treat folk in different ways."

"Since all are different," answered Heron, "there can be no harm in treating them differently."

"One fate and one path are appointed for all," quoth the prioress.

"Ye border on heresy," said Heron. "God judgeth us each separately; and to each is a way of his own, and a separate tale; mix not one man with another."

The prioress was angry; but forbore to answer again, deeming that Heron would still have the best of it. They parted not in all ways friendly.

When he returned to Wood-Isle, he said: "I think I have smoothed the path somewhat. Thou wilt find things easier when thou returnest."

Howbeit, of that they said no more as then, and Pallogris was in no haste.

But Hawk was much disturbed in mind concerning Heron, and his journey out of season. And after he had pondered over the matter for a week or two, he came into the mind that he would go to Isle-Kol, and seek out the cause of these things. He took with him a basket of eggs, and some cheeses and butter, and rode to the priory of the sisters; for he thought that women were

more likely to hear of whatsoever might be going on.

At Isle-Kol he called upon the prioress, and told her that he had long been thinking over the estate of the sisters, and albeit a slow man, he had at last deemed it right to bring some small gift, so that he might further their holy life, which would be much turned aside by the need of considering matters of food and drink, and the like. Then he gave her his basket, and lamented that it should be so poor a gift.

“But,” he said, “I am a poor man, dame, and cannot encompass more.”

It was a big basket, and right well stocked, so the prioress was pleased on all counts, and looked with great favour on Hawk, whom she deemed a rough and honest man. And since he had come so far, she gave him hospitality at her own board.

Hawk ate a mighty great meal, and the prioress no mean one, as women go ; and then Hawk lifted his hands with wonder, and said :

“Of a truth, dame, I understand not how ye attain to this mortification of the flesh ; for ye have eaten nothing, and drunk no more.”

“Nay,” quoth the prioress, “there are those who eat far less than I, who can claim no special austerity.”

Hawk shook his head. “Nay,” he said, “I can not believe that. As for myself, though a temperate man, I could not attain to the abstinence ye show, prioress. Greatly I marvel at it, and I trust ye suffer not in health therefor.”

And he shook his head so much, and had so much wonder at it, that the prioress liked him well.

Afterwards he said : " I heard that Heron of Wood-Isle was here of late. I fear my gifts will be but small in thine eyes beside his, for he is a man of substance and wealth."

" He brought nothing," answered the prioress.

" Save words, no doubt," quoth Hawk. " He is never at a loss for that."

The prioress asked what manner of man Heron was.

" A man without fellow feeling," said Hawk, shaking his head. " No matter how ill things go, he hath ever a light and easy word to dismiss it. Yea, he deemeth himself one appointed to make little of all men's troubles, having none himself. Well, I complain not ; yet if Heron had a tithe of my luck, loud would be his lamentation."

Then it all came out, concerning Heron, and Pallogris ; and at that Hawk was surprised, and they both wondered why Heron took it upon him to do that errand.

Hawk said that Heron was untrustworthy, and shook his head yet more ; and he asked how the days went with Pallogris. The prioress took somewhat of a black view over that ; so they took black views together over as many things as they could think of, and were well content.

" I fear she sets her heart on the young lord," said the prioress. " For she hath letters which she carrieth about with her, and treasureth much."

" No good can come of it," said Hawk.

“Even so I have told her,” answered the prioress.

“Men are not to be relied on,” said Hawk. “They are broken reeds at the best. Howbeit, I perceive ye are a woman of great wisdom, dame, so it is not for me to counsel.”

And what with one thing and another, Hawk went home high in her favour ; and he was drawn to think her a woman he could get on with.

From that day forth, Hawk came often to Isle-Kol. He would go across the wood to the priories, carrying with him diverse things in a basket. He got great thanks for this, and both the brethren and the sisters deemed him the best of men ; but chiefly he grew in favour with the prioress.

CHAPTER IX. OF DAYS IN WOOD-ISLE

PALLOGRIS dwelt many days in Wood-Isle, at Heron's stead, until summer was come ; she wandered along the forget-me-not beds of Heron's brook, watching all the sheep adventures he had promised her, and Agatha shewed her the craft of dealing with wool. So Pallogris dreamed, and saw, and pleased her heart as much as it could ever be pleased without Palombris ; and she talked with Heron and Agatha, until their talk sank into her mind. And this was her chief pleasure, that with them she could speak unhindered ; for they were of no mind to stand in her way, and in Wood-Isle speech was free to all men.

There was a spot Heron loved. It lay on the

top of a tall steep hill, where a ring of ancient earth-work ran round, and the grass was green. They called it Heron's Castle. When he had nought else to do, he would go up thither with his dog, and lie there through a summer's afternoon, regarding the sun on the hills, and the shifting of shadows, and the changing colour of sky and earth, and the birds that flew thereover.

This he loved, and it was his great and secret pleasure ; it was even as food and wine to him to lie there on the grass, high up near the sky, with the fierce air about him, and all Wood-Isle spread out below. Some there were, who said that in this place he communed with spirits, but if it were so, they were pleasant ones, whom it might be happy to know, for at least no harm ever came to any one from them.

He took Pallogris up thither, and they sat on the grass, and his dog curled up at their feet, and slept.

Pallogris said to him : " There is a thought in my mind, which was not there before ; and it will not go away. It is that I have been reborn since I came to Wood-Isle."

" How cometh that about ? " asked Heron.

She said : " After this manner : aforetime, I knew not that I had been born into the world at all, but all times were alike to me. But now it is far otherwise, and I know that I have been born, and am here needing counsel and knowledge ; and there is a past that has been, and a present that is now, and a future to come, and a tale that shall be told concerning me, running through all."

Heron assented.

"We all come to that at some time," said he. "When all is said, there are but two kinds of folk in this world,—those who are awake and those who are asleep. And those who are asleep, dream; but the waking kind see the sun, and the beauty of the earth, and some foreshadowing of the tale that is coming to pass."

"I know not what manner of tale it will be," quoth Pallogris. "But as I sit here, it promises well. Yet I myself must make it; and how shall I make it?"

"It is not so certain that thou wilt have the making of it," answered Heron. "Wisdom lieth more in the seizing of opportunities than in the making thereof."

Said Pallogris: "How shall I seize them? I begin to think it may well be, that I shall need thy help."

"Be sure I will give it gladly," said he.

"Perchance," she said, "I shall need counsel more than help; for often it will befall that thou canst of thyself do little to help me, but much in the way of telling me how to help myself."

"It might come about so," said he.

She continued and said: "Dost thou note that it is hard to keep wise when one is in the midst of those who are unhopeful, and who think ill of all things?"

"Yea," he answered, smiling, "and hardest of all for a woman."

"Why for a woman?" asked Pallogris.

He said : " In most men, that fear of evil changes suddenly to wrath, and they turn round about on those who vex them, and they harden themselves against ill-omened speech. Wrath does not harm a man. But a woman cannot harden her heart and yet save her soul alive ; wherefore she suffers in silence, and is made unhappy."

" Then thou dost not counsel me to wrath ? " she asked.

" I counsel thee much otherwise," he said. " For when Palombris returns, there may be wrath and to spare if he finds thee unhappy ; and then it will be for thee to prove that thou art whole and unspoiled thereby."

" Heron," she answered, " thou doest me already much good. I will endeavour to do after this counsel." Then she said : " Tell me what Palombris would say."

" I think he would bid thee as I do," answered Heron. " Wilt thou listen to a frank word ? "

" Say on," said she, yet somewhat afraid.

" Thou hast a dream in thine heart," said Heron, " and an imagination as to what the little lord is like. In this, we agree together, thou the woman and I the man ; for I think of him as thou dost. But this I say plainly unto thee : be not over fearful lest it turn out otherwise, for what thou seest in thine heart is the man God made, and intended to be. Love that, and treasure it, and never forget it, nor let any one turn thee aside from it. And then if he fail from it, and cast away the pearl of his manhood, and be not what he was

meant to be,—still, thou shalt have thy reward, for that which thou lovest in him thou shalt possess in the end, though it take a thousand years to gain it.”

She said : “ What is this thou sayest, Heron ? ”

He answered : “ The wisdom which prevails amongst those who are valiant enough to believe it.”

“ Then thou wouldst bid me hold fast to my fancies ? ” asked Pallogris.

“ Yea,” he said, “ and to fear little if they come not true as yet.”

“ Why ? ” she asked again.

He answered : “ Because a thing may be true, and yet not come true in this world. Have a care lest thou lose grip of it because it waits another season to bear its due fruit. Yet indeed, I say not that thou hast cause to doubt ; I do no more than give the warning.”

“ It is a hopeful warning,” she said. And she studied deeply over what he had said ; but they spoke no more of the matter that day.

CHAPTER X. NOW HERON COUNSELS PALLOGRIS AS TO WHAT SHE SHALL DO

ONE day, Heron was in the midst of shearing, and he came up out of it to rest, while they drove more sheep ; and he sat on a little scarp of the hill-side, and Pallogris regarded him. He seemed most of all himself when among his sheep flocks, braced for the fray ; but he looked not kingly, but rather

as some strange magician or priest, who sprang from another age of the world's doings.

So he said : " Wool-gathering are we both, I deem."

It seemed then nothing out of the way to tell him her thoughts.

" There were men before kings," he said, pondering somewhat. " Kings arose when strife went wide about the world ; for they are leaders in battle, and stand in the way of war and mastery. But before them were magicians, and wise men, and fathers of the folk, men cunning of heart, who guided the steps of man and beast."

" What came of them ? " she asked.

" O," he answered, " they still live, dwelling in hidden places. Thou mayst stray through the world, and come upon them by chance and hap ; and maybe I am one of them, and Wood-Isle is such a spot. Who can tell but that some day they may return, when peace is made afresh among men ; and then they will rule again."

She did not understand this clearly. He returned to his shearing ; but in an hour or twain he came back, and flung himself on the dry grass.

" Hast thou devised any more thoughts ? " he asked.

She said : " How does thy mind go, as to the likelihoods of my life ? "

" Why," he said, " I think thou wilt win through, and not be far from what thou wouldst most wish, if thou wert to dare to hope for it."

" How knowest thou that ? " she asked.

He answered : " No way that I know of. It is like weather-lore. Some men can tell it well ahead."

" I would that it were so," said she.

" It will be so," he answered : " but set not thine heart on any one way whereby it may come to pass. Watch when the guidance draws thee, and have patience."

That eve, as they went their way slowly home to the house, Pallogris walked a little behind Heron, where he strode on before, his sheep-skin coat cast over his shoulder.

" Heron," said she ; and at that he turned round.

" Ha," said he, " I was wandering away in thought. But what was it thou wert minded to say ? "

She said : " Now tell me, if thou wert I, what wouldst thou plan in thy mind to do ? What would seem to thee the right way to go, and the best to hope for ? "

" Why," said he, " to tell the truth, that is what I was thinking of. But when I had thought of it, it seemed of little worth, since if thou wert I, even so wouldst thou have thought. No man is so wise that he may counsel another. Each must travel his own road."

" Tell me thereof, none the less," answered Pallogris.

So he let her draw up beside him, and then said :

" Often have I let my mind tarry a while on the

wonder as to whither my steps trend in this life, and why I was set down here, and what was intended concerning me. And sure I am, that there was hidden intent in it ; it was no chance-hap or mere drift. Now, if that be so, it is certain that I ought to take thought, and try to find out somewhat of that intent, so that I may fall in with it, and not come into confusion by going against it."

"I would fain believe that," said Pallogris.

"It is easy to believe it," quoth Heron, "for if it be verily so, then are all things more or less clear. But if it be not so, then nothing is clear, and nought matters ; which I, for my part, deem the feeblest kind of counsel, for it goeth clean against all the wisdom of sheep-raising ; and are not men more than sheep ? Nay, I will not trouble my head over that, for clearly I see how it is."

"I also believe it," said Pallogris, "as far as I dare say as much."

He smiled, shook his head, and answered : "Well, thou wilt not find it lead thee far wrong, as I judge. I reckon well that what is intended me lieth somewhere on the road of the hopes and desires I was given ; and so it will be with thee. Hence, make thyself ready, demoiselle, for the day when all thou hast most wished for has come to pass. Study well to perceive what manner of day that will be, and what will be required of thee ; and be prepared for it. Yet often it has come about that not what I looked for has come to pass, but other, and better ; and not whither I fancied

goeth the road, but elsewhere, and that better than ever I had understood, when all is counted in. Hence I say again, hope for all thou hopest for, and be ready for it ; but expect nothing. The path twists and turns. Hold on it ; but be not amazed if it playeth thee strange pranks. Of such sort is life."

"What shall I do to be ready ?" said Pallogris.

"This," he answered. "Thy young lord will belike prove a mighty man, and need thee to be his dame. Shall I tell thee a secret ?"

"If it be a good one," said she.

"That manner of man," said Heron, "needeth not for his joy a woman like unto himself, but one that is different, so that betwixt him and her may run the sum of all things. Valour he hath, and grimness, if I am not mistaken, and the heart that is hard set on its quarry ; and delight in power, and full intent to bring things round to his own way ; also much patience and secrecy. So I read him. Thou, therefore, needest none of these things, but those which are lacking to him ; namely, the heart of peace and tenderness, the quietude which to him will be heaven after the heat of the day, and gentleness, and in all things sweetness."

"All these he hath to boot," said Pallogris, firmly.

"How else could he love them ?" demanded Heron.

Pallogris considered.

"Do I sell wool, and buy me wool therewith ?" said Heron. "Nay, but I buy therewith what I love, but lack. Many a woman there is, who can

match him in what he hath, but few who can give him what he hath not."

"To me," she said, "he seemeth already to have all things, and to lack none."

"Try him," quoth Heron. "Nay, but be sure of this, that thou art valiant and steadfast of heart, but not enough, and therefore longest for the valiance and steadiness which he will bestow upon thee. And this is that which he longeth for likewise; see thou that it is ready for him." And after a little while he said again: "He waxeth mighty in these days, hidden though the growth be; and when he comes back, a mighty man he will be, grown and blossomed and shaped and in all ways nourished to his strength. See thou that thou hast grown likewise."

"How shall I know it?" she asked.

He said: "By this sign, that thou knowest it not."

"Heron," she answered, "I tremble at thy words more than at the words of the prioress."

"So will he tremble," said Heron, "when the day dawns wherein the greatest of his deeds is done; but he will not fail in it. Do nothing; but be thou wise and fair of heart, and there shall be happy days for thee yet."

She left him, for he turned in by the byres, to see that all was well there. But when she had found Agatha, she put hands upon her shoulder, and kissed her, and said, timidly: "Shall I require a secret of thee, Agatha?"

Said Agatha: "Yea, truly, if it be but mine."

"Tell me, then," said Pallogris, "what gifts thou and Heron gave one another, that ye loved at all."

"I know not," said Agatha, "but he was the wisest of all men, and even as the sun in heaven. But what I gave him, I cannot guess."

When Heron came in, Agatha caught him, and asked him ; and he laughed, and said :

"The glory of God."

But more than that he would not say.

CHAPTER XI. THE TALE BEGINS OF A VALLEY IN WOOD-ISLE

PALLOGRIS was sad when need must be that she dwell again at Isle-Kol. Fain would she have dwelt ever in Wood-Isle, with Heron and Agatha ; and fain were they too, but Heron counselled against it.

"Thou art welcome here," said he, "and the house is as if it were thine own. Come and go, and give and take as thou wilt ; it is all in thine hand. Yet if I see aright, luck lieth somewhat on thy going back."

Afterwards, Pallogris perceived that it was even as he had said, though she knew not how the luck came into it ; but Heron was a far-seeing man.

He drove her in a little cart, and left her at the priory of the sisters. The prioress received her, saying little, and giving Heron no great welcome. When he had gone, the sun seemed quenched in heaven to Pallogris, but in a little while, she found it all the better that she was alone.

Matters went quietly ; yet as days went on, they began to shape somewhat differently, for now Pallogris began to change in her mind, and to drift away from the sisters. She remembered many good and happy things that had come to pass in Wood-Isle, and the golden sunrises and the blue sunsets that glowed over it, and those memories became as a dream and a defence to her, until she was hedged around and guarded by thoughts that seemed like walls of gold and sunshine, and so she was parted off from the sisters, and it was hard for them to touch her.

Agatha gave her a spindle, and wool, and had taught her how to dye wool with the juice of roots, and how to spin it into threads ; and at this Pallogris grew expert, and could spin many coloured threads for the prioress to broider with, as was her habit. And she studied to read and write, which the prioress shewed her how to do. Pallogris learnt letters, and shaped them on tablets with a stylus ; it took a long time, for she was slow and gentle, and not quick as Palombris was, who acquired swiftly whatsoever he bent himself to, and could unravel the hidden meaning of things. Often Pallogris would take out his letters, and con them over, to see if as yet she might master them ; but it was long or ever she did that. Yet she made out parts here and there, and was swiftest in finding out those which she most desired to find.

In these days Hawk was often at the priory, and was welcome there. Pallogris knew not what to make of him, for to her his speech seemed all

contrariwise, and she saw that he often said things that were plainly false by his own account, albeit none save Pallogris noted it. Therewith, he was a man not lacking in kindness, and it seemed that he was bent on giving her good counsel.

Hawk was far from being an ill-natured man. He was open-handed, and would give food and drink freely to whomsoever needed it, for he could not abide to see people in want, and to him it seemed as if the most dreadful of all deaths were to die from lack of food. He would sit for long whiles, after he had heard tales of great want and dearth, and shake his head gloomily all to himself, so that any one who saw him would deem that although he had always thought badly of the way the world was made, he had not looked to find it so bad as this. And since he gave freely, and took dark views of things, he gained the repute of being a hardly treated man ; and that was what he thought himself.

He supped not seldom with the sisters, and at these times Pallogris would be there. He turned his speech often on Palombris : concerning whom he had no great hopes.

“Such men,” he said, “push their way in the world, and have no trouble in acquiring greatness. They know nought of the toil and thrift that falleth to poor men. They have no stability, but fly from one thing to another, and soon forget their friends.”

He told many dark tales on this head, showing the lightness of those who belonged to courts.

And the prioress took pleasure in telling tales of like kind; so they enjoyed these things, and comforted one another. But Pallogris grew sad while she listened, and her heart fell low; albeit, when she was alone, with nought around her but the sound-full silences and the calm arcades of trees, and the birds and rabbits, all these tales seemed but as evil dreams; for she herself was not what they thought her, nor was Palombris what they thought him.

Heron came now and again, and they would sit together and speak.

"Did I do well, in counselling thee to come hither again?" said he.

"So it would seem," answered Pallogris. "I feared greatly lest I should be as I was before, and far from the place of thine house, Heron; yet it has not fallen out so, for I seem to have brought back with me all that I loved most there."

"Yea," said he, "even so I looked for it to be."

"Had I tarried yet in Wood-Isle," said Pallogris, "fresh things would have arisen day after day, and I should have forgotten those that had already happened. But here, no new thing cometh, and I take out of my treasury all the memories I gathered, and I count them up, and turn them over, and they take on clearness and substance, and become fairer yet, and more happy, and none is forgotten."

"Such is the use of times of exile," said Heron.

"Tell me," said Pallogris; "deemest thou that when we attain our happiness, we smother under

it ? For if I need to depart from Wood-Isle in order to gain its gifts, it seemeth that I may need to leave my happiness in like manner."

Answered Heron : " Each tide of life goeth its own proper way. There will be rest for thee, perchance, in the far end of things ; but thou wilt not need it for many a long year. For that happiness is not to be tested by the test of smaller times. Its joy will break through all walls of custom and of weakness, and there will be no need to step away from it to see it."

The prioress and Hawk both spoke against Heron.

" It is ever the way," said the prioress, " that those who are young, seek after fair words rather than wisdom, for wisdom often goes against the grain with our human flesh."

Pallogris thought that it might be so with some, and not with others ; but she did not see her way clear to make any answer.

" I set no store by the man," quoth Hawk. " No good ever comes of shutting one's eyes, and making believe that things are better than they are."

" How bad are they ? " asked Pallogris.

" Less good than either thou or I would wish," he answered. " Thou bearest testimony thereto thyself ; for thou art no happier than any one else. But when we know that such is the fashion in which the world was made, it is easier to bear."

" It is not so," said Pallogris. " If I were the one only unhappy woman in this world, it would

be easier ; but if I were the one only glad woman, hard were that."

" Well," said Hawk, shaking his head, " thou art a good maid, and I do not say these things to make thee doleful, but rather so that thou mayst not be misled. Those who expect too much come to no good end."

Pallogris believed this well.

" Moreover," he said, " it were not well done to let thee go such a way that presently thou didst wake up to great sorrow. The little lord is no doubt as good as most men ; but he is after all a man, and we know what that is." And he said yet again : " Heron is a vain babbler, and close-fisted and cunning to boot, and in no wise a right man to be mixed up with. It is like enough to turn out that he would soon forget thee if the little lord forgot thee, and a poor friendship that is."

The prioress agreed that it was so.

Then Hawk said : " There is a valley near the limits of Wood-Isle and Sun-Isle. Heron pastures his sheep there. Often I have thought that it should be mine."

" Is it his own ? " asked the prioress.

" So he says," quoth Hawk ; and so it verily was, for Heron had owned it all his life.

But the prioress understood Hawk to say that it was wrongfully claimed by Heron ; and forthwith she bade Hawk not be beaten down, and despoiled. Hawk had not seen it in this light before ; but now he began to think that perchance Heron ought to have let him have that land. He

brooded over this for a month or twain, and at last, got it into his head that Heron had deprived him of the land, which should rightly be part of Sun-Isle. This irked him much. He told the prioress that he thought the land should be his.

“Then claim it,” quoth the prioress.

But when Hawk, still much muddled in his mind concerning the rights of the matter, went to see Heron about it, Heron laughed at him, and said that the valley had been part of Wood-Isle ever since it was first farmed. Hawk went home greatly put out, and assured now that he was unfairly treated. And thereafter he was firm in his belief that the valley belonged to Sun-Isle.

The prioress thought harshly of Heron.

CHAPTER XII. OF DEALINGS BETWEEN HERON AND HAWK

PALLOGRIS heard this tale, and mused over it. So when Heron came next to see her, she turned the talk upon it.

“I see now that they mean kindly and well,” she said; “but they are foolish, and I am sad.”

Heron laughed a little.

“How cometh it about,” said Pallogris, “that thou art deemed close-fisted, Heron? I should have deemed it a thing little likely to be said.”

“I never used my wealth to buy friends,” answered Heron. “Such friends are dear bought. Yea, rather would I at first withhold gifts from

them, lest they come too swiftly, and prove of little worth."

"Thou art not greatly in favour here," said she.

"I know it," quoth Heron, "nor will I do otherwise than as I have hitherto done."

Then she said: "There is talk going about, that Hawk hath a quarrel with thee."

"It is even so," answered Heron. "But trouble thyself not on that matter."

She asked if he set little store by it; so he said:

"Those who act unjustly, most-whiles overreach themselves. It is an error to go against them too fiercely, or one falleth into a trap. But let them work their will, and they themselves fall into the pit they have dug; and it will be so with Hawk."

Now it was but a day or two later that Heron found the time come for shifting pasture into a fat valley which he kept for that season of the year. So he went thither to regard it, and as he went, called to mind that this was the place to which Hawk had chosen to lay claim. And when he came there, lo, Hawk had caused a fence of split pales to be made, and had enclosed that valley.

Straightway Heron returned, and called men to him, and had that fence haled up and cast aside. Then the next day he drove his sheep in, and all was as it had been before.

But that night the sheep were driven out again, and his shepherds were mishandled by Hawk's men, and the fence set up afresh. Heron bade his

shepherds not take that too much amiss, as he would see to the matter himself. But this took a day or two, for the sheep had to be found and gathered in, and some were sore frightened, and had got into diverse kinds of trouble, and these needed to be looked to. So after this had been put in the way of being done, Heron went to the valley with a strong band of men, and held parley with Hawk's men.

They said and avowed that Hawk had bidden them do this ; nor would they give way. Heron refrained from setting upon them, and answered that he would first speak to Hawk. So he saddled his nag, and went off to Sun-Isle.

"I know not," said Hawk, something cross-grained, "why ye come to me, Heron. Better it would be, to do justice, and avoid strife."

"Even so I think withal," quoth Heron, quietly. "Why then hast thou fenced in that valley, Hawk, knowing as thou dost that it is of old a part of Wood-Isle?"

Hawk said : "I came to thee peaceably, seeking by fair words to make peaceful arrangements. But ye laughed at me, and took the matter lightly, and were passing high-handed over it."

"That valley hath been held of Wood-Isle ever since the land was first marked out," said Heron.

"Better it would have been," quoth Hawk, gloomily, "to have debated the matter in friendly wise."

"Nought there is to debate," answered Heron. "Thou thyself art witness that it was never

claimed by thee of old ; I have pastured sheep there for thirty years, and none has disputed it."

" I disputed it," said Hawk, much vexed, " and ye laughed at me, and made it a thing of nought. What then canst thou look for, but that I should take what was denied me ? "

Heron saw that there was no way here, for Hawk had got the matter so twisted in his mind, that he could not see the plain reason of things.

" Well," he said, " I bid thee understand, neighbour, that I claim the valley as mine, since it has been in my hand, and in my father's before me, without question asked."

And he went away again, somewhat troubled, for he perceived that this might breed strife.

Hawk complained that Heron had sought to beat him down, and had acted in a most high-handed manner ; and since no third man had been at their meeting, there was none to say him nay. Pallogris heard many harsh things said of Heron ; but she held her peace as at that time, waiting until she could speak with some profit to him.

Heron took counsel, and owned to himself that the outlook was not bright ; for he had run up against fools, and whether he took the valley by force, or gave it up without a blow struck, it seemed an unlikeable thing to him, who was a man of peace, yet loved justice. So when he had turned the matter over, he deemed it wisest to make known what he thought thereof, not that he had much hope of aught coming of it.

Thereupon he went over to Isle-Kol, and saw

the prior of the brethren, who was an uncertain man, never able to hold his own in the teeth of others.

"Prior," said Heron, "thou art all only the man left in this country-side who can answer the question I desire to put to thee."

"If it pertain to the holy life," said the prior, doubtfully.

"It beareth thereon, if I am not much mistaken," answered Heron, "seeing that it pertaineth to the peace and orderliness of the place. Now, prior, thou dost wit well that while the old lord lived, he had the right of justice in Isle-Kol, and wide about, as far as men cared to come to him. And that was a good thing, for his word carried weight, even although the case lay outside his own lands. But since he is now departed from us, I demand of thee, prior, into whose hands the right of justice descends."

The prior considered. "It standeth to reason," he said, after a while, "that it is in the hands of the young lord, Palombris; but he is in Barbizen."

"True," said Heron; "but when any man is away, and cannot take up his rights in person, there is ever some one who holds them for him in ward. Who holds the right of justice in Isle-Kol and thereabouts?"

"I think it has lapsed," quoth the prior.

"Nay," said Heron, "that cannot be, for it is still alive in the hands of the young lord."

"Then we must needs go to Barbizen," answered the prior: "for he has named no deputy."

“ See, now,” said Heron, “ when the old lord died, he bade Pallogris keep record of the estate, so that a true account thereof might come to the young lord in due and proper time. Now, I deem that the right of justice went with that, so that it lieth rightly in her hands.”

When the prior saw whither Heron was making, he grew somewhat alarmed, and was fain to wash his hands of the matter.

“ If thou canst prove that,” he said, “ well and good ; but I can take no part therein.”

“ Thou knowest how it was,” said Heron, “ for thou wert witness thereto, as I understand. I think thou art called on to answer as to thy witness.”

The prior did not see it in that light, and would well have got out of it ; but after they had talked some time, and said these things over again, he said that he would go with Heron to see the prioress.

The prioress was unbending enough, and would not allow aught that Heron said. As for the prior, he soon came to doubt whether he remembered aright what the old lord had bidden them do. Then Heron demanded that Pallogris should be asked ; but neither would the prioress allow this, for she said that Pallogris was in her ward, and a maid under ward could not hold rights of justice.

“ But,” she said, “ I think those rights come into my hands, if what thou sayest is true. Thou art confuted out of thine own mouth, Heron.”

Then said Heron : “ And thou art bound, prioress, to give effect to those rights in such a way as the young lord himself would do, were he present.”

"I am as good a judge as thou art, Heron, of what he would wish," answered the prioress. "I know well what thou art desiring to do, namely, to trick Hawk out of the land thou art wrongfully withholding from him."

So Heron said: "I deny that the land ever was part of Sun-Isle, and moreover, I deny that thou hast any rights of justice over me, prioress, for my land is of free tenure. But I wish to find some one who would force Hawk to prove his title on the ground of the King's peace. For if Hawk will swear an oath before a rightly gathered court that the valley is his, I will then swear on oath that it is truly mine, and pick witnesses to prove it, so that it may be recorded and known. But now that the old lord is dead, I know not where to find such a court."

"I will speak to Hawk hereon," said the prioress.

This she did; but Hawk said, that he deemed it uncalled for that he should do such a thing; rather he claimed that Heron should swear the oath.

"Did I not go to Heron, and ask him to talk the matter over?" said he. "But he would not, but laughed at me. Therefore I have done all that I need do. Thou knowest me, prioress, that I am an honest man. Now I dare Heron to come before a gathered court and swear the oath, and take due witnesses."

The prioress deemed this just, and sent word thereof to Heron.

Heron answered, that he would as soon take oath that his hands were his own; and he said

that Hawk was a fool. So the prioress was sure that Hawk was in the right, and matters became much worse, and Heron was no further forward.

When Pallogris heard this, she was much afraid. Fain would she have sent to Heron, but no messenger had she, and it so chanced that he did not come to Isle-Kol to see her. Moreover, so ill did the prioress think of Heron, that she forbade them to meet, for she said that it was not to be thought of that Pallogris should have dealings with so unjust a man. And she thought ill of Pallogris also, and they were at enmity again. So in the end Pallogris shewed her the letter of Palombris, wherein he bade her go to Heron : and the prioress read more of the letter than Pallogris had intended.

“ Well,” she said, “ I deem the young lord speaks in ignorance of the manner of man Heron is,—a miser, and a thief to boot.”

Pallogris answered nought to this ; but she went to Wood-Isle, though the prioress was offended, and plainly shewed her displeasure.

Heron heard all the tale Pallogris told him, of the aim whereof the old lord had planned.

“ I see that I have acted rashly,” he said, “ for I have raised the very question thou wert seeking to keep down. I would I had been aware of this. Now, I will not go back on my word of friendship. Thou shalt choose one of two things. I will go to the prioress, acknowledge that she holds the right of justice whereas thou art in her ward ; and I will take witnesses thereto, and so bring it about that

she shall never deny that she has held those rights through thee. Then she can never claim that the lay abbacy has lapsed. Or else, if thou wilt, I will drop the matter and say no more of it."

Pallogris said that it would be safer if he dropped it till Palombris returned. So Heron gave her his promise.

"And now," he said, "we should be more friends even than before; for I have given up a beloved thing to please thee."

Therefore this matter dropped, and the prioress deemed it a great triumph; and there were those who thought that Heron had not come out of it well. But Pallogris was heavy of heart.

The year wore round, and things went not so well as they might have done. And thus they stayed.

CHAPTER XIII. HOW THERE WERE DIVERSE WHO DISLIKED PALOMBRIS, AND SOUGHT ILL FOR HIM

Now the tale turns to Palombris that was in Barbizen. It so came about, that in the second year of his service with the old King, things turned another way with him than at first. And this was partly by reason of the King himself, and partly because of the mere growth of matters, which trended that way all of their own nature.

For a little after the day wherein Palombris gave his cloak to the beggar, the King gave him a gift of his own devising: and that was a medallion bearing

on it the arms of Kol of Grebana, and impaled with them were the arms of Kol's dame. Palombris wore it around his neck. Giroflanz took it in his fingers, and said :

"I had thought that I knew the arms of all the great houses in this realm ; but I never thought of asking thine. These are strange to me."

"They are the arms of my father and my mother," Palombris made answer.

But there were others of lighter mind, who said :

"Palombris is made a knight. He has new arms." And this went on until a king-of-arms, who was more than learned in lineages and armoury, told them :

"Messires and mesdames, undeceive yourselves. These are not new arms, nor fit for merriment, but most ancient and honourable, for they are held from Kol of Grebana and his dame."

This stilled them a little, for all had heard of Kol ; but the younger ones asked more, and found that Kol's wife was the King's cousin, and the granddaughter of a King. And when this was whispered, it made new way for Palombris, and new jealousies ; and on a day Giroflanz said to him :

"Palombris, thou art of the blood royal."

"What of it ?" demanded he.

Giroflanz answered : "I know not ; but it is as like as not that thou mayst yet wear a crown."

Said Palombris : "Thou doest me no service, Giroflanz, by saying these things."

"That is true," quoth Giroflanz ; "but I am thy friend."

But this was the beginning of great things ; for there were folk in Barbizen other than the esquires and demoiselles who laughed at Palombris, to wit, the great lords who were their fathers ; and these took a different view of matters. Giroflanz heard words dropped that he carried to Palombris.

“ Palombris,” said he, “ thou art like to come into some disfavour in Barbizen.”

“ There may be luck that way,” said Palombris.

“ Hearken,” quoth Giroflanz. “ I heard a great lord say to another : ‘ There will be changes in Barbizen if that whelp grow his teeth and claws.’ And the other answered and said to him : ‘ What matter, when we have them ready grown ? ’ ”

Palombris said : “ That is no bad praise, I deem.”

Giroflanz regarded him steadfastly.

“ I wish thee well, for I love thee no little,” he said. “ But the truth is, there are those who are displeased with thee.”

“ Wilt thou be my friend through thick and thin ? ” said Palombris, smiling.

“ Truly, I will be so,” answered Giroflanz.

They said no more about it ; but true it was, that many a great lord was ill pleased to hear that one of the old blood royal was in Barbizen, and being nourished in the King’s court. They had not counted on such a thing, and many were put out in their reckoning.

Palombris found this out for himself, for he met many small adventures which shewed him how the wind blew in these matters. He was neither pleased nor displeased, but watched how things went, for

as yet he was not assured in his mind as to what would happen to him, and what tale would be told of him in days to come.

If the old King knew thereof, he said little. But on a day when they were alone, he said to Palombris :

“How dost thou fare, cousin ? Art thou happy ?”

“Truly, dear sir,” quoth Palombris, “I am most happy in being near thee, and in having thy favour.”

“And how of other matters ?” demanded the King, sweetly.

“Dear sir,” said Palombris, “all men have their hopes, but hitherto my way has been a way of small things, although of good ones, well pleasing to me. I am still in the dark.”

The old King pondered. Then he said : “Dost thou find many a small stone hard to the foot ?”

“Perchance I counted somewhat on that,” answered Palombris. “This I am sure of, that I should be the worst of men if I made to grumble over my life.”

“Far from it,” said the King. “I would that I were a strong and able man ; but thou knowest that I am but weak, and of no force, and can push thee on but little. Yet what I am able to do, that I do. Most whiles, cousin, it is in my mind, moreover, that no push I can give thee will ever carry thee so far as thine own valour ; and this comforts me. Though I fail, I trust that thou wilt not.”

“In all things, dearest lord,” said Palombris, kissing his hand, “I desire to be thy servant and friend, for well wittest thou that I love thee.”

The old King was pleased in heart ; yea, he was more moved than he shewed, for the love Palombris had for him was the sweetest of all pleasures to him.

“ I trust, cousin,” he said, “ that thy way will yet open out before thee. I fear that I may out of pure kindness and affection be a bar in thy way. What deemest thou thereof ? ”

“ Only this,” answered Palombris, “ that if ever any grim or hard thing cometh to me, I pray you fear not for me, nor seek to stay it, for I have confidence that I am able to encounter hardship. I am from Greenwood, and hardy ; and I have rested long, and gathered force, and had leisure to grow weary of peace and easy life. So let come what will come, dear sir, and for thy part, do what thou canst to support me.”

Never erstwhile had they spoken so plainly to one another as at this time ; but now each knew surely what the other thought, and they were glad.

Now, often it comes to pass that nought happens as long as a secret is kept ; but when it is spoken aloud, and the hope for the first time told, then speedily it cometh about, as if some one had heard it. And so it befell now.

Two full years had Palombris been in Barbizen, and on a day not far from the perfect fulfilment of that time, the King sat in council. It was a stormy council, for things had gone ill on the northern Marches, and there had been strife, and feuds, and contempt of the King, and all those who took a part therein had their hot friends in Barbizen, who

pressed their claims ; and endless was the tangle of the tale, nor could the King freely understand who was right, nor indeed whether any one was right. He said as much as this,—and said also that he judged them all disloyal together, and careless of the realm. But this helped matters forward no whit, for even though the great lords strove together, ever would they join hands to strive against the King, whenso he said aught on his own account. Thus there was fruitless wrangle, and little done for it. Many days this went on, and all that time there was much private talk behind the King's back.

“ I am a fool,” he said, when he went away to his cabinet, and Palombris brought him his spiced wine to drink. “ Ever it happeneth the same way. If I speak, I draw them all on me. I cannot do it.”

“ 'Tis a long furrow to plough, messire,” quoth Palombris.

“ 'Tis no less,” answered the King. “ Fain am I, to hold my tongue, and mostly I do so. But this time I forgot, and said more than was wise. And the worst of it is, that I cannot sustain it, for I lack strength.”

“ It would be good,” said Palombris, “ if John of the Marches went north, and settled the land.”

“ Nay, that is beyond him,” quoth the old King. “ And the southern Marches would straightway fall in on us if he departed. But,” said he, “ it may be a good bone to throw to the dogs.” And he noted it down on his tablets, that he might not forget.

So when the council was assembled afresh, the King put this forward ; and as he had thought,

great dissension came to pass, for no one would hear of it.

“John of the Marches is too big a man already,” said they. “We do not want more than one King in Barbizen.” Then they set themselves to find one whom the King might send, and straightway were all at bitter variance, for each party had its man, and put him forward.

A weary man was the old King, and sick unto death of all this dissension. He felt on the table, and then in his pocket, to find his comfit box ; but he had left it in his cabinet. Thereupon he sent for Palombris to bring it ; and Palombris brought it, and the sight of Palombris with the comfit box vexed the soul of diverse of the lords. And there was one, a hasty man, who looked evilly upon him ; and this lord was holding forth with great anger concerning how hard it was to keep the marches in order and safety ; and Palombris waited till he should cease.

But this lord could not keep his eyes off Palombris, who seemed to him uncouthly like a King ; and he kept on looking at Palombris, and speaking, until the two things came together, and he spoke at Palombris.

Now Palombris was not listening greatly, for he had heard all these matters before ; nought there was new in them for him to hear. And while he waited, he let his mind run thence to Greenwood, and he wove dreams. But to this lord it seemed as if Palombris listened closely, and smiled, and he was all angered thereat.

And suddenly Palombris found them all turned round, and gazing at him, and that lord was saying :

“ Think ye, young man, that ye are able to keep the marches better than we can ? ”

Palombris knew not what moved him ; for ere he knew it his tongue had answered : “ Assuredly, messire, I could not keep them worse.”

The King smiled ; he could not avoid it. He took the box from Palombris, and dismissed him ; and Palombris lightly departed thence.

Long that council lasted, and when it broke up, the old King was weary, and much tired in mind and body, so that he said little. For they had all turned round as one man, and forgotten John of the Marches, and had begun to strive about Palombris. Many said that he was orgulous and haughty ; but others said that it was but the way of a youth, to answer as he had answered. But his foes were not to be put off so easily. They said and claimed, that Palombris had spoken discourteously. Then one mooted it, that Palombris should be sent to the northern marches ; and when this was mooted, it spread as fire among fuel.

Now they broke up all their parties, and formed new alliances. For on one side were many shrewd enemies, who caught at this chance to exile him from Barbizen, and imperil his life. Thus they would remove from their midst one whom they somewhat dreaded ; for a lucky man he would be, if he ever came free and whole from those border lands. And with them went the shrewder of his few friends, who deemed that he might accomplish

the task in good sooth. But on the other hand were those of his enemies who feared him too much, and those of his friends who had trust in him too little ; and they fought and strove in words, and the debate was keen and bitter. At length they parted ; but ere the next day came, many great lords had met privily together, and settled how the council should go.

So the next day Palombris was sent for to the great council chamber. They were all hard-set and eager, both his foes and his friends ; but he shrank not at all from them, but rejoiced to see them so alert, for that way luck lay, he thought. And when he was come, the King moved his chair, and spoke to him.

“ Palombris,” he said, “ we hear thee well spoken of by all men and women, as being wise and promising.”

“ I trust they speak truly,” said Palombris.

“ Art thou of a hardy heart ?” demanded the King.

Palombris answered : “ I think I am no less.”

“ Tell to us,” quoth the King, “ how high thou soarest.”

Palombris smiled and said : “ Nay, O King ; that shall be told when I have soared.”

At this, they were more intent than ever before. Then rose up a lord of some wisdom, a man of great lineage, who said : “ Deign to let me speak, messire.”

“ We permit thee,” quoth the King.

“ Listen, young man,” said that lord. “ The King is minded to give thee a deed to do, and test

thee. The northern marches of this realm are shortening upon us over fast, and are breaking up under our hand. I deem thou wilt have heard the tales told in the burgh. Many great lords would seek those lands, were they peaceful ; but now none is in haste to hold them. Therefore speak plainly to the King, and tell him whether or no thou wilt go thither, and seek to hold the lands."

"It is a large task," quoth Palombris.

They smiled when he said this.

"Yea, it is on thine head," answered that lord. "Thou shalt be made or marred by it. Fearest thou to take in hand so large a task as it is ?"

Palombris looked upon them steadily ere he answered, for now suddenly he saw all his path clear and free before him, and saw the tale of what was to be, and of Pallogris sitting in Greenwood ; and his heart hardened.

"I will hold the lands," he said. "But I am not yet a knight."

"The King sets up and casts down," quoth that lord. "Wilt thou take the fief of an earl ?"

Palombris answered : "If I may choose, then give me my knighthood, and the office of the Constable."

"It may so be compassed," said that lord. He did not as then perceive whither this led.

"What is it that the King requires of me ?" said Palombris.

"We desire thee to keep the marches where they are now," quoth the King.

"I will hold the marches," answered Palombris. "And I shall trust, if I may, to do all thou wishest."

And when the lords saw the little smile that grew in his eyes, those who loved him thought that he surely would, and those who hated him had doubts whether he would fail.

Then Palombris sought out Giroflanz, and told him of this thing.

"The goose chase is begun," said he: "and I am to be Constable of the Marches. Wilt thou come with me?"

Giroflanz said: "I thank thee, Palombris. Of a surety I will come."

CHAPTER XIV. NOW PALOMBRIS IS MADE CONSTABLE BY THE DEVISING OF HIS ENEMIES AND FRIENDS

WHEN the council was over, the old King sought out his cabinet, for there he had bidden Palombris await him. In his hand he carried a parchment rolled up.

"Did I do well?" he asked.

"Most well," answered Palombris. "I thank you, dear sir, that you have done this; for if it turneth out as I hope and trust, it will prove to be of exceeding profit."

"Remember thy friends," quoth the old King, anxiously.

Palombris smiled. "I will always remember them," he said, "and I will strive that they may be satisfied in me, and in their friendship for me."

The King's heart smoothed itself out somewhat.

"I am not well able for these things," he said.

“Ever I misdoubt me lest I have done wrong, and I am not content with aught that I do. Then thou art assured that all has come about well, and as thou wouldst have wished it ? ”

“I could not have asked for better,” said Palombris. “And now be comforted, dearest lord, and wit thou well that all these matters are now shifted clean off thee, and though thou canst help me much, yet it is now become doubtful whether thou canst henceforward change what shall come. It will all be settled by fiercer and harder men than thou ; and what will be, will be.”

“And what wilt thou do ? ” asked the old King.

“That to which luck makes clear the path,” answered Palombris. “Let us not speak of it, lest it spread on the wind. Chance and hap make their own roads.”

“Thou art right,” quoth the King. “I will not ask too much concerning those matters. I will busy myself in doing for thee those easy things which only kings can do ; but we will keep each his own counsel.”

“I thank you for this faith,” said Palombris.

“Thank thyself for it,” answered the King. Then he rendered Palombris the parchment. “This, cousin, is thine appointment as Constable of the realm, a most ancient and honourable office of our household ; I pray thee do somewhat to increase its honour. To-morrow thou shalt receive it in council.”

After this he said : “Let us devise together a little. I will open my mind to thee. There is a

domain of mine own on the marches, called the Tower of the Sweet Winds. It is not large, but a most defensible place, and of great security, and I understand that the land thereabouts is a desirable one for falconry and venerie. Moreover, I have thought that the lords who will be thy vavasours will be better affected than elsewhere; so go thou thither and make it thine own place, and do what thou wilt with it. And whom wilt thou have with thee?"

Said Palombris: "Giroflanz."

The King answered: "He is no more than a butterfly."

"Nay," said Palombris; "he is an ill-taught bird, but of the fine falcon breed, and when he has learnt somewhat, his stoop will be deadly. Moreover, his house is a great one, and will push him on, and see that no ill toucheth him that they can stay. To me he will be friend, and helper, and hostage to boot."

The King perceived that this was no ill-thought of device. "It shall be as thou wilt," he said. "We will give Giroflanz his spurs with thee. But what else wilt thou require?"

Palombris answered: "I have that devised all ready for the time. There are three esquires, men little known, who else would languish and remain no better than as they are now: these shall follow me. The others I will find for my own part. Send me no half-hearted men, nor men who have nought to gain; but send me poor men and hardy, who seek adventure and profit, and will

go far to gain them. But if thou canst find me a few stout serjeants-of-arms, that will be a good thing to do."

"Do as thou wilt," said the King. "I am not expert at these matters. Yet ye will be passing few."

"I desire it so," answered Palombris.

That night, Palombris and Giroflanz watched their vigil in the King's chapel; and in the morning a mass was sung, and those two were made knights. Not many men were there. And when that was over, Palombris returned with the King to the council hall, and there he did homage to the King, and swore his oaths of fealty, and received the office of Constable; and when that was done, he departed away hastily.

He went to the archbishop, who received him warmly.

"Cousin," said the archbishop, "I have heard all that hath befallen, and though I know not what thy paths will be like, this I am sure of, that along them thou wilt attain great fame."

"I shall at least tread them well," answered Palombris.

"Remember all thou hast learned from me," said the archbishop. "I give it all into thine hand; and now I have no more to live for, but am freed of my charge. It rests with thee now."

So he rose up, and stood on his feet, and he lifted his hand, and very solemnly blessed Palombris. Then he kissed him, saying:

"I do not think we shall meet again."

And so it befell, that they never did meet again ; for the archbishop died within the year.

A busy man was Palombris all that day ; and it was past midnight ere he smote his hands together and sought sleep. And the next day also he was busy ; and albeit many asked him what he would do, and when he would set forth, none could find out. And at the end of that day he was ready, and at midnight sat down to write a letter to Pallogris. He wrote but little, telling her that he went away on a long journey, and he prayed her to await his return, for he had hopes that it should be with honour and profit. He sealed this and put it under his pillow, and lay down ready dressed on his bed, to sleep a while. And sound was that sleep ; but when Andreas awoke him in the dark before dawn, it seemed to him that he awoke to a bridal day, for he was filled with happiness, and hope, and his heart saw freedom before him.

And ere he left his room, he committed that letter to a messenger, a valiant serjeant, who carried it away to Greenwood. But of that messenger no more was heard, for Flacandrin caught him and slew him in the Wood Debateable, and read the letter, and knew not what to make of it. So it lay a long time in a corner in Flacandrin's stronghold, and mice nibbled a part of it away. Hence it came about that Pallogris knew not that Palombris had left Barbizen ; and she went on living in Greenwood, hoping for news that came not. And that was a long while.

BOOK III.

THE BLUE BULL.

CHAPTER I. HOW PALOMBRIS AND GIROFLANZ TOOK UP THEIR ABODE IN THE TOWER OF THE SWEET WINDS

ON the third day, an hour before dawn, came Palombris and roused Giroflanz out of bed. He was fully arrayed for riding, booted and spurred, and wore a thick mantle.

“Up and off, Giroflanz,” said he. “We start forthwith.”

Giroflanz grumbled somewhat, and thought it foolish to do such a thing as this ; but shortly he arose and dressed with speed, and took a cut out of a cold pie, and a drink of hot wine, and so felt more in friendship with the world, and ready for riding.

They departed from Barbizen ere day broke : seven esquires were with them, and fifteen serjeants-of-arms. And there was secret speech in the great burgh, and great lords visited one another, when it became known that Palombris had already left Barbizen ; for none had guessed that matters would move so swiftly. But they comforted one another, and said that he went on a wild goose chase.

So swiftly they rode that in four days' time they were deep in the marches of the north, where the great green woods stretched over the hills, and the

streams flowed and foamed among them. It was the spring of the year, and when they came they were as strangers wandering in a fair wild land, where none paid much heed to them, nor took note of their presence. Sweet and wild enough was all that country, whereas the woods were noble and deep; and just coming into the first splendour of young foliage. It was to a little tower on the edges of woodland and mountain that they came; they entered into this, and a weary man was Giroflanz when they struggled into the castle, with dusk falling about them, and the saddest of sunsets fading out of the sky. Every part of that castle seemed dark, and the candles gave out but little light in the hall, and nought was ready for them, since no man wist of their coming, nor prepared sup or bed for them. Giroflanz deemed it dreary as a prison: surely his heart would never be happy there, and his flesh quailed before it. And it was no comfort to him that Palombris seemed a fresh and smiling man, as ready and as awake at the end of the day as at its beginning. So Palombris bade him depart to bed, and willing enough was Giroflanz to depart thither.

He slept long the next morning, and woke only at the fourth hour after sun-up. The ancient hall had been cleansed and garnished while he slept, as if by magic, and it was not so bad a place as he had thought, when all was done. He wandered round the hall somewhat, and perceived that covers had been set on the table on the daïs, and there was venison, and soup, and loaves of a

strange sort that he liked well. Soon after, back came Palombris, who had been out early; he had a hawk on his wrist, and his esquires carried a couple of brace of birds that he had struck on the road.

"Ha, Giroflanz," said he, "how dost thou feel now?"

"Somewhat sad," quoth Giroflanz.

"Thou stayest too long abed," said Palombris. "These strongholds were not built for palaces, but for men much out and abroad. Now let us have our morning meal and be out, for we have much to do."

There seemed no lack of food in the marches at least; for their table that morning was a mighty one, and full of huge dishes, gleaming dish covers, and flagons so big, that they looked as though they had been made for giants. And there was a ham such as Giroflanz had never tasted in Barbizen, and spiced ale of the best; and the sun was shining from a fierce blue sky, and the dust was fine on the roads, and the season at spring. Giroflanz was mollified, and began to smile.

Palombris fed his folk in lordly wise, but himself ate sparingly. And when they were finished, he bade them fill their cups, and said to them: "Let us drink to the conquest of the marches: and I pray that every gentleman here may have an earl's collar in three years' space, and every serjeant the worth thereof."

They drank it, and shortly they broke up the tables, and drew the covers; and all was done

swiftly, and none lingered at the board. So Palombris and Giroflanz walked awhile on the embattled galleries of their tower, high up in the clear air. From their walk they could perceive leagues of mighty wood and purple scarp, and ranges of hills, and dim haze-haunted lowland, and here and there a vast shoulder of mountain that rose up grim and scowling. The stones of that gallery were warm to the hand.

"It is a quiet country," quoth Giroflanz, "and it looketh to be a peaceful time and a dull."

"This is not Barbizen, Giroflanz," answered Palombris.

"Truly it is not," said he. "We shall miss many things."

"Nay," said Palombris, smiling afresh, "I meant not that. I was born in the woodlands, and I learnt war in the Debateable Wood. Here are no peaceful days, nor space for languor."

They sat down in an angle of the battlements, and Giroflanz answered: "Such things I have heard said: but what they mean I cannot tell. Who can harm us here? And what have we to do, save to hold our tower? What more may we ever do?"

"If thou goest out unarmed for venerie," quoth Palombris, "thou wilt in all likelihood never return: for after noble sport in the glades and thickets, thou wilt enter a wood lawn where are grim men of arms in strange liveries, and we shall see thee no more. Nay, Giroflanz, this is a land all at war; in it the strong hand rules."

“Must we keep to the tower then?” demanded he.

“There would come a day,” answered Palombris, “when a knight and a few esquires approached our gate, and said: ‘Sirs, be not cast down nor heavy, for we wish you no injury: but know that we of the marches have deemed that we should be happier if no Constable dwelt amongst us. Know also that on the east and the west all the border castles are ours, and betwixt the burgh of golden Barbizen and you are many castles and embattled holds that belong to us. Yield to us, therefore, courteously, for no good will come of strife.’ What then should we say, Giroflanz? And what would they say of us in Barbizen?”

“Truly, it would be a hard question,” said Giroflanz. “I knew not that it was so hard to hold a tower in the marches.”

“It will be hard, and take long labour,” answered Palombris.

“What then is in thy mind, Palombris?” demanded Giroflanz. “I deem thou didst not come here on a fool’s errand?”

“I will tell thee,” said Palombris, “how else matters may go. It is in my mind to gather about us the mightiest men of arms we can attain, and to subdue the marches afresh. There shall never be a dull day for thee, Giroflanz: thou shalt have strange and honourable adventures, and war with mighty men: and I promise thee such falconry as thou didst never have erstwhile, if but thou wilt go armed to it. And whereas they will presently

say : ‘ Lo, the King hath sent new earls to the marches, and both are boys without beards,’— I desire to go back to Barbizen and say : ‘ King, thou didst send us to hold the marches : I give thee back all the marches that ever were held of Barbizen, both now, and also then.’ ”

Giroflanz laughed ; but there was pleasure as well as wonder in his laughter.

“ Are we able for this ? ” he asked.

“ Either we shall do it, or never again shall we see Barbizen,” answered Palombris. “ I have set my foot in the trap ; but it is not my foot that will be caught in it.”

Giroflanz considered.

“ Hearken,” quoth Palombris, “ thou hast all the things most men desire, Giroflanz ; wealth thou hast, and rank and noble estate, ever since thy birth, so that none may give thee any new thing therein, nor any more than already thou hast. One thing alone thou hast not, and that is fame and honour. But now I offer thee this thing, which wealth and high blood may not cheapen for thee : and if thou wilt have it, it is thine.”

“ Thou art a wondrous valiant man,” said Giroflanz, “ and with much persuasiveness dost thou talk. Thou shalt devise, and I will follow : for I have been taught that the blood of kings breeds kings, and I believe it.”

They handselled that between them.

Then Giroflanz said : “ What shall we do now ? ”

“ We will ride a-horseback, and spy out the land,” said Palombris.

Then he took Giroflanz with him, and shewed him how to govern a castle. They looked into all rooms, and reckoned up what was therein, and reviewed all the servants who belonged to the place, and questioned each as to his name and tasks, and his wages and privileges, until they knew all these things. Then after they had taken measures for changing here, and amending there, as seemed best to them, they called together their own men, and appointed the watches of the castle, and who should have the keys. And Palombris cautioned them all straitly that they should in all matters obey swiftly and exactly; for he told them that great honour awaited those who did well, but those who did not well should be sent back to Barbizen. And when they looked upon him, and regarded him, none of them doubted that this would be so.

But he said: "The lord Giroflanz and I will share no watch, and have no time of leisure; for we shall labour all our time, and rest and sleep as best we may."

And for a wonder, Giroflanz was pleased rather than sad thereat.

Then after a noon-cup of spiced wine with a sop in it, they got to horse and rode forth with two esquires and a little company of serjeants-at-arms, taking their falcons with them. Up hill and down dale they went, amid wooded glades and towering peaks; rivers ran across their path, clear as crystal, babbling over their pebbles, and all was glorious and green and gold, and the air fierce and fresh. They roused up francolins as they went, and their

dogs started hares, and pheasants flew whizzing before them. Deer came to the edges of the thickets, and fled fast away at sight of them. And once they saw a marshy place, wherein wild ducks dwelt, with necks of glittering bronze and green. And ere they had gone far, Giroflanz was content, and no longer desired to be in Barbizen.

They rode their ways about ten miles, and then crossed a swift and shallow river, and came to a village, and a castle set on a hill. It was a strong castle, and by no means small; but the village seemed less prosperous than it might have been. So when they had gazed upon it some while, they rode forward, and came up the path to the great gate. A horn hung there, and this they blew upon.

CHAPTER II. OF THE FIRST BEGINNINGS OF THE BLUE BULL

THERE came a watcher to the gate, and stepped out among them, and asked of them who they were. Palombris named himself and Giroflanz, and said that they had come to see who dwelt there. Presently the lord of the castle came, and the gates were unbolted, and opened, and Palombris and his company entered in.

The lord was a man fairly on in years, tall and well made, with grey hair and beard, and a head on the way to be bald. His name was Grimol of Greensheaves. He seemed a plain man, and his dress was homely and rough, though seemly to his

rank. Three or four young men hung about him, who might have been his sons.

The lord welcomed them, and led them into his hall, where he set before them a repast of cold venison, and many kinds of stuffed birds, and ale in foaming tankards. So they sat there and conversed.

The lord said, that it was not often his neighbours called upon him, and he asked how it was that they came. Palombris answered that he desired to know all his neighbours, and to be friendly with them ; and then he told that he was the Constable of Barbizen. The lord answered, that he had not heard of this, and he asked all the news, and Palombris told him as much of the tale as he deemed good ; and ere he had told all, they were on passing good terms together, and the lord was listening intently, and in friendly wise, for he was somewhat drawn to Palombris.

“ Truly,” he said, “ this is a strange tale, and one that I am glad to hear, whereas we hear little news in these parts. And what wilt thou do ? ”

Palombris said that he was minded to breed milk-white horses, and to pursue falconry, and to take up such scrimmishing as might come to hand : and he hoped to dwell in amity with all honourable men round about, so long as they dwelt in amity with him. Then they talked a long time concerning horses, and dogs, and hawks, and like matters, and the lord was in great good humour, and said that he perceived Palombris to be one of themselves. But he spoke bitterly of the great lords of Barbizen, who sought for nothing, as he alleged, but to beat

down the small lords, and do them all the harm they might ; and he rejoiced that Palombris was in enmity with them, and promised that he would be his friend.

He told Palombris, moreover, that there was another stronghold not far off, where dwelt a lord who was a very worthy and honourable man ; and he said that he would send three of his sons with them, to show them the way. Thereupon he called his sons to him ; stalwart youths they were, hardy and strong of limb. Giroflanz thought them rough cubs, and they were no less, for of gifts and graces they had few, and they seemed somewhat lowering of brow. Yet Palombris deemed that they looked mightily promising, and received them so well, that the lord's heart warmed to him. But when he perceived that Giroflanz was proud, he turned to Palombris and said :

“ Sir, here we breed the men who shall be masters in Barbizen to-morrow.”

Palombris thought that some had been nurtured in Greenwood ; but of that he said nothing. Instead he answered and said : “ I trust ye are a true prophet. Give me thy three sons, if they be willing, and they shall enter my service. And if they prove of good heart, and pushing men, great honour may be won in the paths I shall mark out for them.”

The old lord gazed at him a moment or twain, and answered : “ Sir, if ye will take them, and give them opportunity of advancement, I shall be right full of thanks, and ye shall have no better men than

they, for they are of a sound stock, and valiant youths. Ye know not yet how hard it is to have six grown sons, and find occupation for them, besides daughters : but if the like cometh to pass with thee, perchance thou wilt then know that my thanks are true."

Palombris said that he could well understand it ; and the lord went on, and told them much more about his sons than Giroflanz wished to hear, and his troubles with them, whom nevertheless he deemed lads of the best, if they had but room to grow in. Giroflanz chafed, but Palombris sat steady and attentive, and ever had the right word on his tongue ; and indeed, he liked well to hear it, and carried it all in his mind, and thereby learnt much more of the secrets of the marches than Giroflanz ever knew. And what with this and that, Palombris henceforth had a firm friend in that lord, who deemed him the most worthy of young men, and heeded nothing that was said against him, but took his part in all things. For he was a very obstinate man, and could not easily change his mind.

So they departed from that castle, and rode towards the next ; and on their way they had good sport, so that Giroflanz was well pleased, and the three sons thought highly of them. The lord here was a very old man, and stricken with gout ; and moreover, he was of quick temper, and hasty, and had so many sons and grandsons, that the place seemed full of them. They called him Pied-à-Feu. But Palombris spoke to him so sweetly, and with such patience, that the old man looked in friendly

wise upon him, and inveighed against the great lords of Barbizen, who thought of nothing but their own profit, and destroyed the realm. About the King he was somewhat peevish, calling him but a poor creature ; but Palombris told him how well the King had spoken of the lands round the Tower of the Sweet Winds, and so turned the matter, that the old man was mollified, and began to think the King less a fool than he had supposed. And Palombris told him that he needed three young men, as pushful and eager as might be, and that he would deem himself lucky if he might get them hence. Whereupon the old man vowed that he would never find better youths than his grandsons, and promised to send them, well armed and horsed, to enter the service of the Constable's household. And he begged Palombris to come to see him whenso he might, for that he rejoiced to hold conversation with such young men as he, and was ever eager for news. And this Palombris promised.

When they rode back to the Tower of the Sweet Winds, Giroflanz was thoughtful.

He said : " How shall we feed all these new mouths ; for they are a passing hungry race here ? "

Palombris answered : " Thou shalt see to that, Giroflanz, for the woods are full of deer, and the marshes of birds ; and what the King's friends lack, we will presently reive from the King's foes, to which also thou shalt see."

In this way they surveyed the whole land round about their tower, and they made friends with all the lords who dwelt near them. Some were harder

to deal with than others, but when these found that their friends and neighbours were well-disposed towards the little Constable, they changed their minds for the most part. And wheresoever he went, Palombris chose out and asked for his service all the likeliest young men that he found, such as seemed to him hardy and pushful; and they were glad, and so were their fathers. Thus from the day he came into the marches, there grew up around him a mighty household, young men of good blood, who looked to him for advancement. He arrayed them all in one livery, for he and all his household wore the Blue Bull of Barbizen over their own armoury; and they were called the men of the Blue Bull. This was the beginning of the Blue Bull: and soon it was hard to gain entry therein, for he chose his men with great care, and those who did not well were sent home again.

But those who did well he taught and nourished, and kept with him, and they loved him much, and the fame of the little Constable and the Blue Bull went wide about. Poor men and of hard life were they all; but they lived well, for of meat and ale there was no lack, and all the lords around were friendly, and sent gifts, and the Blue Bull shared the gifts equally, and had one purse together; for this was the name the little Constable had from the first, that nothing stuck to his fingers, for if he had much, he gave it, and if he had but little, he gave even that.

So when the first year had gone, the power of the King waned not any longer in that part of the

marches, but grew, and became firmer. For all those who had occasion of dispute found that the little Constable was wise in counsel, and shrewd in the searching out of cases, even as John of the Marches had taught him aforetime : and the Blue Bull had force to execute his judgments. And when this was known, men had resort to him, and he saw that justice was done, and for the most part those who resorted to him were satisfied.

As the summer went, and the harvests ripened, there were forays from the hills ; strange men came into the domain of the Sweet Winds, and did damage, and robber, lords who lived by pillage, wandered abroad reiving what they might. Then Palombris and Giroflanz, with the Blue Bull, pursued after them, and fought with them, and drove them away ; and the harvests ripened in peace, and men were amazed, and said that never was such a good year, nor so peaceful a time, as under the little Constable. And the Blue Bull found Palombris the most skilful of captains, one in whom to trust, wise and foreseeing, and a very valiant man of war : and his fame grew. So when November was come, and all the year's work over and finished, Palombris went into winter quarters, and settled down for Christmastide ; and many of the Blue Bull he bade go to their homes, and tarry with their own folk a while.

Then it came about that many a young man returned to his own house, and in no few of the march strongholds the fame of the little Constable grew, and his praise was spoken. And now all the

domain of the Sweet Winds was securely in the hands of Palombris ; and those who had been cold towards the King, and had hated all governance, and loved their own ways, now were all at one in their allegiance to him, and none knew clearly how it had come about.

And Giroflanz grew hardy and expert in arms ; and when Yule was past, and they had celebrated the Epiphany with games, he came into the courtyard and saw many great trees cut down and lying there, and Palombris in a fur hood, watching the serjeants who sawed with great saws, and hewed with axes.

“ What is to do now ? ” demanded Giroflanz.

Palombris answered : “ So it is, that I am minded to build war-engines ; and they shall be such as have not been devised aforetime.”

“ What wilt thou do with them ? ” asked Giroflanz.

So Palombris said : “ We will take castles and towers with them ; for this next year we shall need to deal with fiercer and more froward men than we have as yet dealt with ; and when the free lords raid us, we will not only drive them off, but we will pursue them into their holds, and beleaguer them. Therefore we shall devise engines. For now the conquest of the marches is truly begun.”

Palombris heard many things that not all men knew of ; for all told him their news freely, and he had knowledge of matters from each that came to him. And soon after, the old King sent him letters by a messenger. Palombris knew him, and wel-

comed him, for he was a trusted esquire of the old King, even as Palombris had been, and for no small purpose would the King have parted from him.

“Ha, Aloys,” quoth Palombris, “hath aught chanced to the King, that I see you here?”

“Messire,” answered Aloys, “I left him well, and content, as by God’s grace I trust he remaineth; and he gave me messages for thee.”

After Palombris had read the letters, Aloys sat down with him, and told him other and secret messages that the old King would not write, pleasant speeches and sweet words. And then he said:

“Moreover, Constable, messire hath somewhat that he desireth me to open to thee; for he hath heard that evil and disloyal men, who regard not their allegiance, are like to trouble thee this spring-tide. Already thy name is spoken of in Barbizen, and many there are, both there and also in the marches, who are little disposed to look upon thee with favour, for they begin to fear thee. This we hear of by small tokens and trifling things; yet messire desireth thee to know the same. So he biddeth thee have a care of thyself, and make preparations against this year, whereas thine enemies will do all that they may to destroy thee.”

Palombris thanked him, as one who had not heard such tidings, and he sent back by Aloys much news for the King’s ear, that should tell him how matters fared with him.

“But,” he said, “of what I shall do, I say little, for it is not yet clear. But I trust to do well, whatever befallerh. Repeat this to the King.”

Aloys promised to do so ; and then he drew forth a packet, long and slim, and not heavy.

"Messire," he said, "I have a charge to give thee this packet secretly, without any woman's son witting thereof. My lord obtained it at great expense, and privily, from a great distance, deeming it expedient for thee to have."

"What is this ?" demanded Palombris, taking it into his hands.

Said Aloys : "The Greek Fire." And he unfastened the wrapper, and showed Palombris two tubes of horn and glass.

"This is indeed a gift worthy of a King," answered Palombris.

"He prayeth thee to keep it carefully, and not use it until need presseth," said the esquire. "And then, when thou art utterly at the end of thy powers, have resort to the Greek Fire, the which, moreover, he has had blessed and censed by a priest. He saith, he shall rejoice if ever his help be that which tideth thee over the jaws of death and defeat, whereas he oweth thee somewhat in that respect."

Palombris was moved.

"Aloys," he said, "thou hast done me great service. And now tell our dear lord, who is so kind and wise, that I kiss his hand for the love he sheweth towards me, and I thank him for his gift, which I trust to use for the good of the realm, and the furtherance of peace and justice. I will give him true account of what comes thereof, if I live to do so."

“I trust, messire, that you will live long, and gain honour and fame,” said Aloys.

Palombris thanked him yet again.

CHAPTER III. HOW THEY WERE BE- LEAGUERED IN THE SWEET WINDS

PALOMBRIS had his spies wide abroad in the land ; and withal, each lord's tower, where dwelt kinsfolk of the Blue Bull, was a watch-tower for him. So when it was nigh to Septuagesima, all the spies came in from the eastward, reporting that a great host of the lords was assembling. It came the day after Sexagesima, three battles of well mounted men who carried archers and serjeants behind them ; and they tarried nowhere on their ways, but rode day and night until they came to the further end of the earldom of the Sweet Winds : and then they meant to burn and destroy, and to drive what could be driven, and to carry off whatso could be carried, but to leave nothing behind them on their road back. They came by three roads, and met on a day at an appointed place. All the castles were shut up, and no one stirred abroad as they passed, so that the land seemed empty and deserted.

But when the battles had met, and come to the place where they intended to turn back and begin their pillaging, there was Palombris and the Blue Bull, all ready and eager for the fray. The Blue Bull was by far the smaller host, but it was of men young and well-trained, rough and pushful esquires desiring advancement ; and so grimly and fiercely

they set on, and so well did Palombris lead them, that the great host lost many men, and gained no victory.

So the next day it began its retreat, with the Blue Bull following close on its rear ; and now all the strongholds round about threw open their gates, and the lords issued forth in strength to raid and harry on the flanks of the great host : and great joy they had in so doing. And the host was so hard pressed that it scarce burned a house or stole a cow, but hurried by night and by day till it was clear of the Sweet Winds ; and well it was that it tarried not, else it had been utterly destroyed. And none the less it left many good men behind, either slain or fallen into the hands of Palombris.

They had deemed that they would be safe whenas they had left the earldom of the SweetWinds behind them, and dispersed to their homes. But Palombris made no halt or stay, but pressed on after. All the lords who fell into his hands he held that while in durance until he should return, for over all who were taken in his own earldom he had the rights of justice.

As soon as he had passed the borders of the Sweet Winds, and came into the next earldom, he sent word to the earl thereof to come and meet him, but the earl did not come. But Palombris was in no wise minded to wait for the earl, but straightway went to the first stronghold he came to, and demanded of the lord thereof whether he had been of that host to break the King's peace. But the lord defied him, and bade him depart ; so the Blue

Bull broke down and burnt the barbican, and filled in the ditch, and brast in the great gate, and stormed the tower in force : and mightily well did those younger sons comport them, and great honour some of them achieved. Then Palombris sent that lord to Barbizen, rescue or no rescue, and put a castellain in the tower, to hold the estate until the King's will should be known. And after that he pressed on and took castle after castle, and did to each in the same way as he had done to the first. For if they would not admit him, he broke down their defences with his engines, and took them by storm, but if they would swear truth and fealty, he laid a fine upon them, and let them go free.

A wrathful man was the earl when he heard of these deeds, and forthwith he called up his vavassours, all who had not been taken by Palombris, and moved against the Blue Bull. A stormy meeting befell between the earl and the Constable, for the one alleged that his privileges were injured and assailed, and the other pointed to his title as Constable, and nothing came of the meeting, for they could not agree ; but then Palombris attacked the earl's host suddenly, ere it was wholly assembled, and the Blue Bull overthrew it, and that was a great overthrow, so that the earl himself was taken, and sent to Barbizen, rescue or no rescue, and the levy was scattered.

Giroflanz gained great honour and repute on this journey, for to him fell a great part of the host-leading of the Blue Bull.

When old Pied-à-Feu heard thereof, he was vexed, and said: "I grieve that this popinjay should gain aught of the honour that belongs to our little Constable. But he is a fool and a feather-head, and it is well known that such men often make passing good host-leaders."

Now Easter was come, and Palombris held it in camp, but when Easter was over, he broke camp and began his return, for half the castles in this earldom were held by castellains of the Blue Bull, and his company needed rest and refreshment, and their number was much wasted. Moreover, diverse things needed yet to be done. So he returned to the Tower of the Sweet Winds, and broke up his host there, and much booty there was to part, and ransom money to settle. And many of the Blue Bull received advancement at the hands of the little Constable, and were made knights, and some were promised other honours when the King's will might be made known through the kings at arms; and one or two lordships and knight's fees fell vacant, and were granted anew. And all were in high joyance, and each lord said to the others that not for long had they had a season so full of pleasure and honourable deeds. Many men were added to the Blue Bull, yet some who would fain have been of its company were turned away, since no room there was for them, nor wealth to feed them, as at that time.

Now Palombris set himself to strengthen and

supply the Tower of the Sweet Winds. He built two more wing towers, and enclosed a great court, and greatly enlarged and beautified the castle.

All went smoothly till the late summer. Whit Sunday came, and Trinity; hay making was finished and over. Palombris was busy building his tower, and storing it, and sitting in his courts of assize, and seeing that the Blue Bull grew expert in war. And Giroflanz hunted and hawked, and scrimmished with robbers and adventurous lords, and such folk as haunted the woods; and he went about visiting, and sharing courteous love with all the dames and demoiselles, who favoured him, although their fathers and lords did not, for they could not forget that Giroflanz was one of the great lords of Barbizen whom they hated. None the less, Giroflanz was gay and handsome, and made festivity wherever he went, and many a young man now patterned himself upon Giroflanz, and endeavoured to be as he was; but none copied Palombris, because that he seemed to be other than as they were, and of a different nature.

That summer, the peasants noted that Palombris took all his rents in food-stuffs, and took all the hay they would give him. They demurred somewhat, and said:

"Lord, we begin to be pinched, ourselves. Some of us will scarce last through the winter with so little hay for our beasts, if the season be hard."

He answered: "No matter. Ye are like to have good plenty while I am well stocked; but what ye keep for yourselves may be of little worth to you."

When the shrewder sort heard that, forthwith they sold him all their hay cheap, and asked what they should do with their beasts.

"I will tell you that when need arises," he said.

Therewith they were well content. So the time passed ; but Palombris knew what was shaping.

Slow, heavy folk were those peasants, little given to worry, and silent, but keen. They took whatsoever came as part of the day's work, and steadily tilled their land in the midst of war and strife ; nothing seemed to turn them aside. They were not in haste to praise any man, and they were close and hard at bargaining. But they saw that Palombris intended them well, and they placed some trust in him, the more so whereas he was himself a hard man to outwit, and paid no heed to many words, but enforced what he would. He did not go out of his way for them, and of this they thought well, for neither did they go out of their way for any man.

Harvest lay but a week ahead when a serjeant rode to all the villages, and last of all through the little burgh below the Tower of the Sweet Winds. He cried :

"Take to the woods, ye who will, or come into the castle with your beasts."

Thereupon some did the one, and some did the other, and all the houses were stripped and left empty, and many folk, with their dogs and horses and kine, and also some pigs, were sheltered in the new court which Palombris had let build. They made themselves booths and huts to dwell in. All the houses were burnt out with fire, and all the hay

that could not be moved ; but the corn was left standing.

A day or two passed ; then came a mighty great host, which encamped all about the Tower of the Sweet Winds. Six earls led it, and in it were lords and knights very many, and a great array of serjeants. They did not go to the towers of the other lords, but only to the Sweet Winds ; all else they avoided, and left alone. When they found the village burnt, they set to and built booths, and pight the greatest of campments all around ; but the corn they left standing.

Then the chief men among the peasants came to Palombris and said : “ Lord, we grieve that the corn has been left unburnt. If we shall not have benefit thereof, it is an evil thing that our foes should.”

“ Comfort yourselves,” said Palombris. “ There were a hundred and fourscore and ten thousand folk in Nineveh of old time, who knew not their right hands from their left.”

They did not understand him, but were puzzled.

So Palombris sat in his stronghold as a cat sits in a tree, watching his foes, and doing nothing.

But when harvest was fully come, the host set to work to reap the corn, and then Palombris sent for the peasants, and said :

“ We of the Blue Bull are about to undertake a gentle and courteous adventure, wherefrom we hope to acquire honour. Be ye all ready with your horses and bullocks, and such carts as ye have, to bring in the harvest.”

This caused them to fall into great good humour, and many jests were made ; but soon after the fourth hour of the day all the gates of the Sweet Winds were thrown open, and the Blue Bull issued forth all armed and accoutred, and great then was the scrimmishing and on-falling, and the host was roused. But the Blue Bull forayed into the encampment of the host, slaying many, and setting fire to the booths and tents ; and ere they retired, the peasants had with much labour and sweating loaded all the corn in one way or another, and borne it into the castle. They took two parts out of three of it, in all, and would have been quicker, but they tarried to make a corn-man out of the last sheaf, and carried the corn-man triumphantly back with shouts and great joyance, deeming this the luckiest of things to have brought about.

Palombris was well pleased, for now they had much corn and to spare, and could last a long while without troubling themselves.

So the host had to foray for corn, and trespassed on the lands of the lords round about, whom they had heretofore left alone. This caused great disagreement to spring up between them and the lords, who had shut themselves up in their towers ; and now the lords no longer waited to be bidden, but armed, and issued forth of their holds, and laid violent hands on whatsoever they could grasp belonging to the host, and did great damage and annoy. Then the host sent to the lords, saying that they had not wished to have strife with them, but only with the Constable, and they desired them to

cease from doing them this damage, whereas it was to their common profit that the Constable should be stayed from oppressing the marches.

But the lords answered and said, that they cared nothing what the host thought thereof, but that they themselves were well used to taking care of their own lands, and were friends of the Constable ; but they understood that the Constable was hard upon rogues and reivers, who hated him exceedingly. Old Pied-à-Feu said, moreover, that next to the wicked lords of Barbizen, these scourings of the marches were the most hateful to him ; and this offended the host, who had thought to be welcomed.

So some parts of the host went off to lay siege to the lords in their towers, who forthwith shut themselves up therein, and defied them. And all this while Palombris lay quietly in the Tower of the Sweet Winds, where they had food and drink in plenty ; but the host was not at its ease, and some of those who were with it went back to their own lands.

CHAPTER IV. OF THE BREAKING UP OF THE LEAGUER THAT WAS AROUND THE SWEET WINDS

Now time fared on somewhat, and the great host lay before the Tower of the Sweet Winds. The earls had hoped to reduce the Constable by famine, but when it appeared that he had more store set by than they had, they devised measures to break into the castle. But in no wise could they do this, for

the Blue Bull defended the castle as well as they had aforetime attacked others.

That autumn was a pleasant and a warm season, but when October was well-nigh gone, and the host had made three assaults without fruit, the cold came. First came heavy rains, which were evil for the host ; and then great winds blew, which blew down their booths. So mighty were those winds, that the watchers on the galleries of the tower had need to hold fast to the parapet lest they be clean blown away. But after this it fell calm and dry, and the cold set in exceeding bitter, with black frost, and all men put on their thickest clothes. Many dead birds were picked up in the castle, and some were so tame, that they hopped into the hall. This stayed all assault. The host had wood in plenty, so that it cared less for the cold than for the rain and the wind. None the less, it was in a hard case, and men went away daily to seek their own lands. Also, many fell sick. Within the Tower, the Blue Bull held a tournament at play of chess, and thought more of it than of the host that beleaguered them.

Now as time went on, it proved that they had stored too little wood for fuel, for it began to give out, and this was a great matter, considering the exceeding bitterness of the cold. When this was reported to Palombris, he said :

“ It is better to fall in battle than to die of cold,” and he bade all the fires be kept going as before, so that they might be warm, for he could not abide cold in any wise. So they stinted not the fuel. But at last it had all but wholly gone ; and at sunset the

seneschal came to say that there was no more than would tide them over one day to come, except they burnt the chairs and tables.

Palombris pushed away his chess-board.

"Nay, that is of no service," he said. "We shall soon burn them all, and be no better off."

Then they said: "The booths of the peasants are built of boughs and branches, and would burn well, and serve us some while."

"Nay," answered Palombris, "I see no wisdom in such a counsel. I shall have no rents, and we shall all die of famine next year, if we let our peasants perish of cold."

They thought the matter might be contrived somehow, and many things were said for and against: for they might well foray for corn next year, and make the King's foes feed them. But Palombris put aside all these counsels.

So they demanded of him what they should do.

Palombris answered: "We will arm ourselves, and make sally, and bring in wood; for this is by far the best counsel." And thus it was agreed.

That evening the fires were let burn low, and the tables for chess play were empty, and there was no harp-playing or tale-telling; but men gathered ready inside the sally ports nearest the wood, with warm clothes under their harness. They stamped their feet and clapped their hands, so cold it was: and the moon shone wondrous bright, and their breath steamed in the air like clouds. Then Palombris bade the posterns be opened, and out they went, all softly towards the wood. The serjeants

had axes and saws, and baskets for small fuel, and the knights and esquires were ready to defend them. As for the peasants, they assembled under the walls, to see what should chance, and to help, if so they might, in bearing in the wood.

But it came about otherwise than as they expected, for those who lay in leaguer saw them forthwith, and came out against them, and a battle befell that soon all joined in. The serjeants cast down their axes and baskets, and betook them to sword and shield. Not long it was, ere they of the Blue Bull drove in one part of their foes ; and another part saw it, and feared to be taken in flank, and so gave ground, and fled back into their campment, throwing into disarray those who were issuing forth to help them ; and presently all the battle was turned to a like end, and the Blue Bull pursued their foes, and drove them into their camp. And by now, all things were clean out of hand, and went as they would, and not as any man willed. For the men of the Blue Bull were warm, and the cold sweet air was even as wine to them. They tarried nought in their steps, but rushed on, and assaulted the campment, and straightway took it by storm, and burst in, and scattered the brands of the watch-fires, and set fire to it, and all the tents and booths were swiftly in flame, and the leaguer began to be broken up. Then they fell on the fiercer, and fought without stint, the more they saw their foes give back ; and this combat, which began as a sally to get fire-wood, ended in the overthrow of the whole host that had come to besiege the castle.

When day dawned, fresh and clear, over the blue hills and the frost-bound woods, the great host was fleeing by all the roads, cold, hungry and downcast, and their leaguer was but black and white ashes, still smoking, and giving forth sparks under the foot. A few peasants dug busily amid the ash for whatsoever might there be found; but the Blue Bull were assembled down by the great gate, begrimed and right joyous. Five out of the six earls, and well-nigh two hundred lords and knights bachelors had fallen into their hands, and a very great pleasure was that to them.

Then said Giroflanz: "Luck comes about in strange ways. Even thy hatred of cold serves thee well, Palombris, for had we not made that sally for fire-wood, we had been beleaguered yet, and cold to boot."

Palombris answered: "When all has been done that can be done, luck oftentimes runs on its own feet."

They lodged their prisoners as best they might; but towards noon Palombris bade them all be sent for. He sat in the great hall of the castle, with a great company of the Blue Bull all armed about him. On one side of him was a lectern brought from the chapel, and thereon a copy of the gospels, open to shew what it was. And beyond, the doors of the chapel were opened, and the priest stood there ready vested, and candles were lit. But on the other hand of Palombris stood a huge serjeant, stripped to his shirt, and with a bare sword in his hand.

Palombris looked upon the prisoners, and said :
 “ I bid you to understand that I have the rights of justice throughout this earldom wherein ye were taken. Also, I am the Constable of Barbizen, and carry the King’s justice with me, and his commission under seal to bring peace into the marches. I require you all, each and several, to take oath on these holy gospels that ye are now, and will ever more be, the King’s faithful vassals, or else that ye will owe allegiance to none but such as are faithful to him. And I require you to swear also to obey the King’s commission ; and this without reservation, or deceit, but with true hearts. And if ye will not, then such as will not shall die a swift death without postponement.”

They most of them smiled somewhat awry ; but some looked exceeding dolorous.

Then said the elder of the earls : “ This is beyond your commission to do, Constable. Ye know not the law and custom hereon.”

Palombris regarded him intently.

“ I know them better than ye deem,” said he.
 “ But since when has it been the law and custom in Barbizen, that when a man’s head is smitten off, he dieth not ? ”

The earl was silent, and now it was the turn of the Blue Bull to smile, which they all did very heartily.

“ I see not how I harm any man,” said Palombris, “ by requiring of him oath that he is in amity with his lord and King.”

They still seemed ill at ease, and answered little

that was to any purpose : yet it was plain to see that they thought the Constable was having the best of the matter.

“ I should grieve if many worthy men came to an ill end,” said Palombris, “ for I desire to do you no injury. But unless ye do according to my demand, it will fall out as I say.”

But the earls did not wholly believe this, and with one accord refused. And then, after some doubt, all their lords and knights refused, for those who wished to accept feared dishonour and contempt from their peers. Forthwith Palombris rose, and all those that were in durance were led into the courtyard.

The first earl was caused to kneel, and with one blow the serjeant of arms smote off his head. Then the second was brought, and the like happened to him ; and all this while Palombris softened no whit, but regarded them with a face of flint. But when they saw this, the prisoners paled marvellously, having no desire at all to die in this manner, and the third earl called out and said :

“ Ho, messire, be not hasty. I think we will all swear.”

So Palombris accepted this.

And now all the northern marches began to be straitly in the hands of Palombris ; for the fame of these deeds went wide abroad, and they were never forgotten. After he had taken their oaths, Palombris sent the three earls and many of the greater lords to Barbizen, there to renew their

homage to the old King himself. And Palombris picked out three men of the Blue Bull and set them in the earldoms that had fallen vacant, to hold the rule until the King's will should come concerning that matter. So that spring the Blue Bull stamped down all the war upon the northern marches, and set peace therein, so that no man any longer feared pillage, nor any woman violence; and the King's writ ran there again, and the old law and custom was set up, and justice was upheld.

And as for those who chafed, and would fain have held to the ways they were wont to be in, even these sooner or later began to say: "Well,—he is but a boy, but he is Kol's son, and that is not given to all men to be."

So when Easter was come, Palombris and Giroflanz returned home to the Sweet Winds, to pass the season there: and they passed it quietly enough, for much they needed rest.

Giroflanz said, as they walked in a gallery: "I think the conquest of the marches is well-nigh ended and accomplished now. For this is the turning over of a page."

"It is not finished yet," answered Palombris. "We shall have one more fight, as I guess; and it may be that it will be the stiffest stour of all."

"How knowest thou that?" asked Giroflanz.

Palombris said: "As the peasant foretells the weather for sowing and for harvesting. I wit well how the wind blows; and we shall see."

Said Giroflanz: "We of the Blue Bull are a match for many."

When this talk had fallen, Palombris presently went aside to his own lodgment. He stood in the depth of a window for a while, leaning his elbow upon the sill, and gazing forth over the woods, that were in their first leafage. Far below, the village was rising again ; the fields were sown with corn, and that summer would be a rich one for many a man ; and every man and woman there rested safe under the heavy hand of the little Constable. And far and wide now went that peace, and the power that enforced it. He dreamed somewhat thereover, passing through his mind all the deeds that had led to it, and seeing all the strange and grim adventures that had built it up to what it was. It seemed to him a great and a mighty tale, and he took pleasure in it.

Then he stirred and smiled ; for suddenly he called to mind that he himself was the little Constable.

So he took out of his breast the medallion that the King had given him, of Kol's arms, and the arms of Kol's dame ; he laid it on the sill, and set beside it the iron buckle of Pallogris. The more he pondered over them the less he knew what they meant, but sure he was that they were of surpassing beauty, so that they delighted his heart,—the rich and glorious gifts of Kol and his dame, and the dear iron of Pallogris. He was warmed and strengthened thereby, and his spirit enriched ; but he knew not how that came to pass.

And so he left the window.

CHAPTER V. WHAT THEY THOUGHT AND SAID IN BARBIZEN WHEN THE BLUE BULL BECAME KNOWN

IN Barbizen had been great to-do when the first news of the Blue Bull became known : for it was in no wise to the taste of those who had sent Palombris to the marches. It came in whispers, but those among the great lords who heard it said to one another :

“ He has done better than we looked for : but he will find it harder to subdue the marches than to rule the Sweet Winds.”

But shortly after, they heard true and certain news of the host that had ridden into the Sweet Winds, and had been thrust forth again ; and then the foes of Palombris were stirred, and said that he would soon be seeking somewhat more than the Constableship. Moreover, they began to perceive that they had made great error, and had thought him a gosling, who was a hawk. Scarce had they ceased troubling themselves, when they heard that he had followed up the fleeing host, and captured many castles ; and there came many lords to Barbizen, to place themselves in the King's hands. And this was a new thing in Barbizen, so that the old King wrote Palombris a jesting letter, saying that he had needed to look into ancient books, and to consult his oldest king of arms, as to what he should do in accepting homage ; for he was not used to it.

That was a trouble of soul to many a lord in the

burgh, for now was the fame of the Blue Bull becoming known. Those who came to Barbizen spoke highly of the little Constable, and said that he was the wisest and most skilful of captains, and the Blue Bull a most fierce and fell company, such as had never been known before. Then they told of the engines of the Blue Bull, that would batter down mighty walls, and shatter great gates, and of the huge serjeants that loved the little Constable as though he were their own babe. And they also said that the Constable was a man of much justice, who set every old woman's troubles in order. They meant this to be a jest, and so it seemed to the great lords who heard it ; but there were others who saw it differently, and did not understand that it was a jest.

So the lords bestirred themselves, for now they were somewhat in an angry mood. They brought it up in the King's council that Palombris should be stripped of his Constableship, because he had gone beyond his commission, and trespassed upon the rule of other lords. But his friends nay-said this ; and up sprang new friends for him, now that he had shewn himself mighty ; and all these answered violently, and said, that it was well known that the Constable had been given the over-rule of all the marches, and bidden to subdue them all. The King had little to say, for he knew well that it would do Palombris no great good to take his part, but he sent for John of the Marches, and John came as speedily as ever he might, and they held counsel over the matter.

Then under John's counsel, the King said that if the Constable should be stripped of his office, he desired to know who would strip him. So that fell through, for when they debated this, it was clear to all that no man in the realm was like to have force to overcome the Blue Bull. Then they veered about, and demanded that the King should sweetly and in friendly wise ask Palombris to lay down the Constablenesship. But when this was debated, it fell through also, for no man could point to any good reason, save that which bit the biter. In this way matters dragged on ; and the King and John had things in the end as they desired them to be.

But now the lords set to work in another way ; for they desired the King to send back those lords whom Palombris had caused to come to Barbizen. The King granted them this, but when the lords had done homage, and gone home, very many of them kept to their oaths, and were friendly and obedient. But the great lords plotted together, and did no little to help stir up the great host that beleaguered the Blue Bull in the Tower of the Sweet Winds.

All Barbizen knew well of that beleaguerment, for news came quick and fast, and the great lords boasted openly that the little Constable would come home to Barbizen a shorter man than he set forth. But when the Blue Bull broke up the beleaguerment, that was well-nigh as great an overthrow for the lords of Barbizen as it was for the host. And the common folk, who hated the great lords, took the part of Palombris ; and worst of all, they

laughed, which was exceeding bitter to his foes, and hard to endure. Then came a fresh flock of the march lords to Barbizen, all of them saying that never was man like the little Constable, and that the Blue Bull was the grimmest company of fighting men ever seen.

When this came about, the great lords held privy consultation together ; for they said to one another that now they were all in danger, and that if the Constable lived, he would without doubt slay them all, and take their wealth, and oppress them as he oppressed the marches. And some there were who said :

“ See ye not how in all things he sets the common people before the men of noble blood ? That is the mark of the man who desires to see none in the realm save the master and the slave.”

And the wiser and craftier pressed this upon the others, alleging that Palombris wished to destroy all the men of good birth, in order that he might have no peer, and might have all the realm at his own will. Thereupon they were of one mind that some great thing should be done, and they agreed to set to work to raise such force as might destroy him.

The King sent to Palombris, and said : “ But what shall I do with all these men that thou sendest me ? For they have friends here, and those who as yet have none will shortly acquire them : and then they will agree together, and hatch plots, and I may not stay them.”

Palombris sent back and answered : “ Trouble not thyself, dear lord. Let them plot, if so they

wish ; it will keep them from weariness. These matters will not be settled by counsels in Barbizen, nor by agreements together of men, but by the sword in the marches. It is here that we shall say yea or nay ; and whatsoever Barbizen answereth us again will change nothing.”

The old King was somewhat comforted.

Now there was a man named Anguis of Anguiscart. He dwelt in a strong tower far in the woodlands, nigh to the borders where the northern marches of Barbizen died away in the hills. Anguiscart was a mighty great castle, perched on a high rock. Anguis was one of the proudest and fiercest of all the march lords, a man of high lineage, deep in counsel and wise in war, and cruel and strong beyond any other : he was but a plain lord, but in wealth he was the equal of an earl, and it was commonly said that he kept a hundred knights at his board, turn and turn about during the year, so that while some were with him, others were at their own homes, but ever were there a hundred of them at his table. And this was more than any earl of the marches could do, save only the Constable.

Anguis had an ill repute, not only for robbery of those who journeyed by the mountain roads, but also for all manner of high-handedness and injustice, and also on account of women. Very great trouble he wrought, and Palombris had heard thereof, and deemed evilly of him in all ways. But Anguiscart was far off, and Palombris had not as yet seen his way to go thither.

But because of these things, Palombris watched Anguis very narrowly, and set men to bring him report of what was done by him, and of his motions abroad.

There was a man named Souris that Palombris had taken into his household. He had been brought up for the Church, and had been a monk ; but he was in no wise fit for the life of a clerk, even in the realm of Barbizen, where men were easy enough to please in such matters, and he had been cast out, and wandered here and there, living as he could. Palombris found that this man was wondrous wise in many ways, for he was good at reading and writing, and a shrewd judge of menfolk and womenfolk, and glib of tongue, and of the sort which is full of plots and plans, but lacks aim. So Palombris took this man, and let him do much as he would, and found that of all spies and ambassadors he was the best ; for if he were told to find out the truth about any man, and let do it in his own fashion, he could persuade secrets out of a stone wall. And since Palombris was easy with him, and did not go against the grain, this man loved him much, and was faithful to him.

So it came about that he returned to the Sweet Winds soon after this Easter, and told Palombris that Anguis had been at Barbizen.

“ So I have already heard,” quoth Palombris.

“ Ha,” quoth Souris, “ but I have found out somewhat that thou hast not heard yet, Constable.”

“ Then thou art a passing wise man,” said Palombris. “ But so it is, that thou hast shewn as much before.”

“Truly,” quoth Souris, “I will not deny that I am a good man to ferret forth deeds of darkness; albeit, I fail oftentimes to ferret forth the good, which is a great loss to me.”

Palombris smiled, and said: “Like finds out like.”

“Well,” said Souris, “hearken to me, for sure and certain sooth is what I say. In Barbizen they desire a man of force and wisdom to lead their counsels, and it seemed to them that Anguis was that man. So they had him thither, and made much of him, and I deem that he sees his path to make profit out of them.”

“Therein he is over bold,” said Palombris, “for the great lords of Barbizen never cut themselves with their own knife.”

“That is far from certain,” quoth Souris. “But perchance they will not do it twice. Well, Anguis hath counselled them to right good purpose, and shewn himself expert in devices. For on Trinity Sunday, as I understand, there will be a rising in the marches, and thou wilt surely go to stamp it down. But whereas thou art gone, then will the whole marches rise behind thee, and Anguis will be the captain of the host. Then the bishops will say, and make it known, that all the oaths sworn at the Sweet Winds are null and void, and may be set aside, for that they were made under duress, and so are of no worth. Seest thou not how many men this setteth free to be thy foes? And moreover, on Trinity Sunday, all the lords will leave Barbizen, and flock to join Anguis, and watchers will be set to prevent the King sending

thee any word. So the host against thee will be reinforced with men and gold until it is the mightiest that the realm can call together ; all to pull thee down, lord, and overthrow thee."

Palombris flushed red as fire.

Then quoth Souris : " A proud man art thou, lord. Surely few men are thus praised by their foes."

Palombris thanked him, and rewarded him well.

But Souris knelt down in front of him, and said : " Lord, I am an untrustworthy man, and a great liar, as well thou knowest. But thou hast been a man that any one such as myself would love, and all that I have said is the truth. I pray thee set it not aside."

" I promise that," answered Palombris. " None the less, thou shalt tarry here until all is over."

But although he knew what manner of man was Souris, he knew also that Souris told good truth.

CHAPTER VI. CONCERNING FLACANDRIN, AND HOW HE WENT TO ISLE-KOL

Now the tale shifts for a little while to Pallogris in Greenwood, who waited long to hear news of Palombris, and heard none ; and by now was much time worn away. But so it befel, that on a day Flacandrin paced his hall, and saw a parchment in a corner. Greatly he wondered what it could be, and he picked it up from the floor, and studied it : for he perceived that it had a blue bull fairly painted across the top, and a coat of arms that he knew belonged to Palombris.

A long while he stood, turning the letter over and over, lest perchance there should be any strange thing about it. Then he remembered how he had taken that letter from a man they slew in the Wood Debateable, well-nigh three years past, and had made nothing of it, but cast it aside : for in those days the Blue Bull and the arms of the Constable had been things of nought, whereas now they were of great import to all men, whether his friends or his foes.

So Flacandrin took the letter to the rascally priest who served as his clerk and chaplain : but after the priest had read it, he said that unless a hidden meaning lay in it, there was nothing of any great import.

“ Read it out,” quoth Flacandrin.

So the priest read it out aloud.

“ It is clear that the little Constable himself wrote that,” said Flacandrin, musing. “ But to whom is it superscribed ? ”

“ To the demoiselle Pallogris in Isle-Kol in Greenwood,” quoth the chaplain.

Flacandrin pondered awhile.

“ This is a strange thing,” said he, presently. “ The little Constable hath the repute of a woman-hater ; but he is far too young and too wholesome for that to be true, either one way or the other. It may be that we have hit upon his secret.”

“ Can we make aught of it ? ” demanded the chaplain.

“ Thou art a fool,” answered Flacandrin. “ It is far better to put a man of that sort under obligation,

rather than to blackmail him. I know better than thou dost. Nay,—hunt thou craftily through the letter for hidden meanings, and if thou findest none by to-morrow, we will send the letter to the place it was meant for.”

The chaplain sat up late that night, with five large candles, busily seeking through the letter for aught that might be hidden therein. But the next morning he came to Flacandrin and said :

“ I deem it clear enough that nothing is here but the plain words themselves.”

“ Then we will send it into Greenwood,” quoth Flacandrin.

“ See now,” quoth the chaplain, “ ye have but to let me copy the letter, and add a line or two at the end ; and then I will take both letters, and myself wend into Greenwood. And when I have spoken to the demoiselle, straightway I shall wit if she hath heard from the Constable since this letter was written. If it falleth out so, then too much knoweth she for us to do much ; and I will give her the letter he wrote. But if it prove otherwise, then I will give her the copy that I have made, wherein he shall direct her to come hither to be under thy ward. And then, lo, she will come forthwith, and thou wilt have the little Constable’s lady under lock and key. No doubt she is fair, and can sing like a linnet.”

Flacandrin shook his head.

“ I do not care to do it,” said he.

“ Wherefore not ? ” demanded the chaplain.

“ ’Tis a good and a subtle plan.”

"It might be exceeding wise," said Flacandrin, "if we could be certain as to what would come of it. But if we fail, I think the little Constable will have a heavy hand on all who had a finger in the pie. I care not to provoke him to such a length."

"What could he do?" demanded the chaplain.

"It may be," answered Flacandrin, "that even if we brought it about as thou art devising, he would afterwards catch us in a cunning net, for he is a far-seeing man. But if we made error, he would be cruel as death. I know these men, Jack Priest. The game is not worth the candle."

But the chaplain besought Flacandrin to come to no conclusion until he had been into Greenwood; so to this Flacandrin consented, and the chaplain made ready to journey thither, promising to bring back a true report.

It so fell out, that one day Pallogris strayed along the overgrown road, thinking of Palombris, and wondering when he would return by that same path; wondering, also, what had happened to him in this long while,—so that she was happy and full of solace at one moment, and sad with dread of evil at another. And when she had gone so far that she was wholly withdrawn from Isle-Kol, and was alone with herself, she saw sheep coming towards her, and one of the men who drove them was Heron.

Long it was since they had met, yea, the greater part of a year; wherefore they greeted one another with pleasure, and Heron tarried to hold speech a while. Yet nought of very great moment had

they to tell, but only small things, for the days had gone quietly.

Pallogris said to him : " How goeth that matter as to the valley ? "

" That is much as it was," quoth Heron ; " not that it will ever remain so, for one must not put up idly with injustice, lest it grow too great on the earth. But it is well to wait, and not to be hasty."

And after they had spoken a little thereof, he said :

" What news of the little lord ? I trust that it is well with him."

" Truly," said she, " I know not ; for no word cometh from him, nor any word of him. So often I dread lest ill hath befallen him."

Heron regarded her.

" Thou knowest the saw," said he, " that no news is good news : a shrewd saying, worthy of remembrance. Yet good news cometh at whiles. Who can tell what may next come to hand ? "

" Thou art of foresight," she answered, hopefully.

Presently, while they still spoke together of this, they saw a man, roughly dressed, come towards them. He rode on a shaggy little horse. Heron studied him, for he did not like his looks, and the man was a stranger, not of those parts.

" Who can this be ? " said he.

Then the man approached, and spoke to Heron.

" Friend," said he, " I pray you direct me to the demoiselle Pallogris who dwells in Isle-Kol."

Pallogris was about to say that she was that demoiselle, but Heron saw what she intended to do, and spoke first.

"Ye are not far from her," said he. "It is no long journey to her. Whence come ye, friend?"

"I bear news of the little Constable," quoth the man, watching them. He perceived that for a little while they did not know of whom he spoke; but presently Heron understood that he spoke of Palombris.

"Hast thou a token?" he demanded.

"Yea, for the right person," answered the man.

Pallogris trembled in all her limbs; but she obeyed Heron, lest she do aught to bring peril upon them, for she saw that he distrusted this man. But after he had considered, Heron saw no reason for fear, so he said:

"This is the demoiselle Pallogris. Shew her thy token."

"How shall I be certain thereof?" demanded the man.

"It is hard to gain certitude of anything," said Heron. "Most whiles we go by our judgment."

The man looked keenly upon Heron.

"Thou art right, there, master," said he. "Well, it is this way. I think thou hast lacked news this long while past. Is it not so?"

"We have had less than we should like," Heron answered.

"So I thought," said the man. "Now, we picked up this letter in the Debateable Wood, and, not to make a long story of it, my lord sends it on to the place it was meant for, whereas he would well do the lord Palombris such small favour as he may. But I will not part with the letter till I have surety that it reaches the right hand."

“Thou canst be easy on that score,” quoth Heron. “Many a man and woman hereabouts will answer for it that this is the demoiselle Pallogris.”

“I am somewhat minded not to take too much on trust,” said the man, “for if I blunder, then has my lord done no good, but rather harm.”

Heron perceived that he was no fool; yet it was not clear how he could be stayed from finding out more than might be good, for Heron was very unwilling that the letter should be bruited before the prioress, and he knew that Pallogris was of like mind. So at last he answered:

“Thou mayst take it as sure that the lord Palombris will thank thee little for calling all men as witness to thy deed. Let it stay at that.”

“Tell me thy name,” quoth the man.

Said Heron: “It importeth little. I am Heron of Wood-Isle, and thou art none the wiser.”

So the man gave Pallogris the letter that she waited for, and when she at last held it in her hand, all the earth swam before her, and great hope and terror were in her heart. But the man turned away, and rode back, and Heron followed after his sheep: and they left her to her own devices.

And when Pallogris had read the letter, she felt as one who sees the sunshine again after many days, and all the world was sweet and fair and perfect to her, and she kissed the letter, and fell asleep under a tree.

But when the chaplain returned to Flacandrin, he said:

“ I have done as ye bid me, messire. It is a great loss that ye followed not my counsel ; but at least I have told them nothing, and found out much. Well, it is a strange thing.”

“ How so ? ” demanded Flacandrin.

“ Go thou and see her,” answered the chaplain. “ Perchance thou art right, and I am a fool ; but it is beyond me. Thou mayst understand it better.”

Flacandrin looked up ; and afterwards said : “ If that be so, truly I am drawn to go thither. How did ye leave the matter ? ”

Said the chaplain : “ They are three years behind hand with their news ; for they know that the little Constable is departing to the marches, and no more than that. And it is certain, I think, that they desire this matter to be hidden. I do not understand it.”

Then said Flacandrin : “ Well, I will go. In a fortnight I shall set out for Anguiscart, to lead a host to meet Anguis, and help to throw down the Constable ; but ere that, I shall have leisure to go into Greenwood, for greatly I wish to see the lady-love of that same Constable.”

So shortly after, there rode up a company of men to the priory of the sisters ; and to those who dwelt there they seemed as angels out of heaven for the glory of their attire and the beauty of their faces. They asked for Pallogris, and when she had been found, Flacandrin dismounted from his cream-coloured courser, and came into the priory, and sat and spoke with her.

Flacandrin was the handsomest of men, fair of skin and of chestnut hair, that curled sweetly under his blue bonnet. His *côte-hardie* was of silk, and all his mail was brightly polished, and his hands were very fine and delicate, like a woman's hands. And he was very fair-spoken, and most courteous in his ways. Pallogris was frightened at him because of his exceeding beauty, and was not at ease with him, she knew not why. But Flacandrin had an ill repute as regards women, and such things cling to a man's ways so that some women can read them, even though they understand not what it is that they read. But afterwards he caused her to feel somewhat happier.

He said : " I have come a long journey, demoiselle, for the sole purpose of looking upon thee : I trust that thou wilt not be angry thereat."

" I have no reason to be angry," she said.

" None at all," quoth he ; " and I shall hope that thou wilt have less, ere I depart. I know that this land is the home land of the little Constable, and that thou wert his playmate of old time ; but no other here knew I by name : wherefore I came to thee."

She said : " Art thou a friend of his ? "

" I will not say as much as that," he answered. " I dwell in a tower in Debateable Wood, too far from Barbizen to be deeply acquainted with the Constable. But all men know of him, and of his deeds."

" I have heard that he hath become Constable," said she, " but no more do I know."

Then he told her all that had come to pass in the

marches, and of the great fame of Palombris ; and that was a joy to her and an amazement to them all. And he regarded her closely while he spoke.

The prioress said, coldly : " Now that he hath become so great, he will forget us all."

" Dame," he answered, " I have heard that the little Constable is not a man quick at forgetting aught that hath once been in his mind."

Pallogris was glad at that, and smiled upon him.

" Men are forgetful by their nature," said the prioress.

" Dost thou deem that so ? " asked Pallogris, " or is it not true that those who are of noble heart are faithful and enduring in love ? "

" Assuredly," said he, somewhat struck.

" Love is the shallowest of things," quoth the prioress, " and in it is no stability."

" All must speak as they have seen," answered Flacandrin, smiling.

" To me," said Pallogris, " it seems the greatest of all things, and the most stable."

" Then for thee no doubt it is," quoth Flacandrin.

" I do not consent to that," said Pallogris. " I mean that it is the greatest of all things, not only for me, but for every man and woman."

" Does it never break down ? " asked Flacandrin.

" Never," said she, " for what breaks down is not love, but the likeness of love."

" What dost thou know thereof ? " quoth the prioress.

" That is not a fair question," said Flacandrin.

" I may well demand the same of thee, prioress."

“Wilt thou encourage her in these foolish fancies?” said the prioress.

“With a good will,” answered Flacandrin, “for I believe the demoiselle is right. I know,” he added, “that I have never gone back from a thing I truly loved; and if love be true, verily it is the strongest of all things. Men will die for love of fame, or honour, or money; why not then for love of love? Perchance love is rare, but then, as far as I have seen, even money is not common.”

“Men are not quick to die for any cause,” said the prioress.

Flacandrin smiled after a fashion that puzzled her.

“I never knew a man that was worth calling a man, who would not die for some cause,” said he. “Nay, now I come to think of it, there is not one of my esquires and varlets who wait without, but would die for me: I am not sure why.”

“What wouldst thou die for?” asked Pallogris.

He answered: “If I demanded that much of the little Constable, would he tell me plainly?”

“I did wrong to ask,” said Pallogris, meekly.

“Well,” said he, “no doubt I am not so good a man as I might be. But certainly, thou speakest wondrous well, demoiselle.”

After that, he made ready to depart.

“Why do they call him the little Constable?” asked Pallogris.

Said Flacandrin: “Because he is so small.”

“He is taller than I,” said Pallogris.

Flacandrin shook his head. “Thou hast grown

since old times, I deem," said he. "He is half a head shorter than thou, if men report truly; but stalwart and strong of build."

The prioress said how ill it looked that a woman should be taller than a man; and all the sisters said much on that matter, until Pallogris felt sad.

"It is our duty to discourage her," said the prioress. "We must not seem too cheerful."

So they did not; and now they began to let Pallogris understand that she would never be worthy of Palombris, and she began to fear as much also. But when she was alone, she lay wakeful very long in her bed, turning over in her mind the exceeding delight of his glory, for to her it was the greatest happiness.

But when Flacandrin was come again to his stronghold in the Wood Debateable he said to his chaplain:

"Thou wert right; it is a strange thing, but I think I can perceive what lies at the root of that flower. The little Constable is unlike any other man, so it is no strange thing that his demoiselle should be unlike other women."

"Well, it is a taste I do not share," quoth the chaplain.

"It might be well for thee if thou didst," answered Flacandrin.

"Why so?" demanded the chaplain.

Flacandrin answered: "I bid thee observe and take notice, that they are hardy and strong men

who love one woman, and love her much : thereto I warned thee aforetime. We are weaker men than they. And because the little Constable and his demoiselle are of this nature, therefore they will prevail in Barbizen, and all who are like unto them."

"What, art thou fey, messire?" demanded the chaplain.

"By no means," quoth Flacandrin, cheerfully. "But new men are rising up about us; take thou care to see on which side thy bread is buttered. We shall need to wander elsewhere when true lovers dwell in Barbizen, for they are a desperate folk to deal with."

Three nights thereafter, Flacandrin set out with his company to join Anguis on Trinity Sunday : for so had they agreed.

CHAPTER VII. JOHN OF THE MARCHES HATH DREAMS IN THE NIGHT, AND DEPARTS TO BARBIZEN

It was about this time that John of the Marches, lying in his bed at the March Castle, could not sleep. He tossed and turned, and woke suddenly by starts, and dreamed ill dreams, although he could not remember what they were about, save that when he woke, ever he felt unhappy concerning Palombris, and fearful lest some harm should come to him. So at last he lit a candle, and roused his dame, and told her that he was troubled in mind. When she heard that, she also became

fearful for Palombris, and they went not to sleep again, but sat talking till dawn came, planning what should be done, and how they would do it. But when dawn was come, John gave the keys of the castle to his dame, and set off swiftly for Barbizen with two or three esquires, and a few armed serjeants, bidding a company of gentlemen to follow him in force, as soon as they might make themselves ready.

So well he rode, that he came to Barbizen by the next day after, and sought out the old King. And mightily glad was the King of his coming, for he felt himself to be wound round and enmeshed by secret devices that he could not strive against, and much he needed counsel and help. John learned what was afoot, and ferreted forth much that was hidden ; and he reported what he learnt to the King's private ear. And it seemed heavy news to the King.

"What shall we seek after, in the way of devices ? " he said.

"Courage, dear lord," quoth John. "I think we will seek no devices. We have no great force wherewith to back ourselves ; so in these matters little can be done. But shortly I expect a company of my march lords, who will be a great help to us, for they are wholly faithful and loyal ; and these shall see that no evil is done unto thee."

"Nay, I fear no evil to myself," quoth the King.

"Seest thou not, dear lord," answered John, "that the crown of Barbizen is itself in peril ? Now we will hazard to hold it safe, so that Palom-

bris may find a King yet in Barbizen when he returneth."

The King understood this well, and roused his courage.

Then continued John, and said : " Whitsuntide is over now. Soon the tide will set away from Barbizen, and drift towards the marches. Let us seek not to stay it, but rather further it all we may. For our little Constable is a fierce and valiant man, and I think he will beat down his foes in battle, whereas they come against him : and it may be of great moment that they should all gather together, so that he may strive with them, and overthrow them. Therefore let them all go whither they will ; and let us make blind our eyes, and behold as little as may be, for in this way we shall do best."

Hereto the King consented.

Then they set the march lords in the King's household when they came into Barbizen ; and for the rest, they made to see nothing, and did as though they knew not what was afoot. But the King granted no licences to the lords of Barbizen, that they might fare to their homes, but said that he desired them to remain in the burgh. None the less, it was soon seen that the burgh emptied marvellously as Trinity Sunday came near ; and John sent off a messenger to bid the Constable be on his guard. But when the messenger came to the Sweet Winds, he found it empty.

And this while John and the King sat in Barbizen, waiting what should befall.

CHAPTER VIII. HOW THEY LAID SIEGE TO THE CASTLE OF ANGUISCART

BUT long ere Trinity, the little Constable shot his bolt of war ; for he held Ascensiontide with great solace and rejoicing, and the greater part of the men of the Blue Bull were gathered together to that feast, and the Tower of the Sweet Winds was full of men. So when the day was over, Palombris called for the keys of the Tower of the Sweet Winds, and when the castle was locked, he rose in hall, and said :

“ Let every man of the Blue Bull be ready to wend with me at dawn to-morrow ; for to-morrow I set forth to Anguiscart.”

Right glad were they thereat, and swiftly made them ready. With the first dawn they made their journey from the Sweet Winds ; and there were five hundred gentlemen of arms, and as many serjeants, each of them with two horses. They journeyed swiftly, and at every place they came to, they found a company awaiting them ; and they pushed on, regarding not what they left behind them, until they came to Anguiscart. A rich land was that, full of fields and meadows, and deep woods, for Anguis was a man of wisdom, and saw well to it that his people had the wherewithal to pay their rents. But Palombris bade the corn-fields be left untouched, and they went past tower and field, until they came to the castle of Anguiscart. Fair enough they found it, perched on a

height beside a gulf, and mighty as to its walls and towers ; for no stronghold in the marches was so strong as that.

So they sat down there, and looked upon it, and very mighty they deemed it. On three sides all was sheer, and a man might drop a stone from the parapets even unto the foot of the rock ; but on the fourth side a clear sward of grass ran up from the edge of a wood, and there were strong towers, and a great moat fed by a spring of water, and a barbican to hold the bridge, all of it exceeding mighty.

Water-lilies grew in the moat, and the grass on the sward was rich and sweet.

Now they sent to Anguis, and bade him open his gates : but Anguis came to the gate, and they held converse across the moat, and he said :

“ I rejoice greatly that the Constable of Barbizen is come to see me ; but I fear that ye will depart the swifter if I let you in. So I will keep my gates closed, and then it may be that ye will tarry a while.”

“ Ye are fewer here than we looked for,” quoth Giroflanz.

“ Well, ye came sooner than we had reckoned on,” said Anguis, “ but be of good heart, for there may be a greater company of my friends before many days have gone.”

He was a well-beseen man, tall and big built, and of good speech. They thanked him for his courtesy, and said that they were as fain of his company as ever, and would entertain all his

friends well, when they should come. Anguis saluted them, and they bowed to him, and laughed, and departed asunder.

Forthwith they began the siege of Anguiscart. They ringed round the moat with watches, to stay all who should seek to creep in or to escape out; and then they pight their encampment a little way within the wood, a strong place, well fenced. And when they had done this, Palombris set to work to build engines, for the which he had brought with him all the iron parts, and those that could not be made swiftly.

They made the engines under cover of the wood, the serjeants felling and squaring trees, and the Constable showing them how to shape and assemble the pieces. Thus they built two petrariae and a great arblast, and also a ram and a pent house, whereas the walls of Anguiscart were too tall to be scaled with ladders. Mightily proud were the serjeants of these engines; yea, and would scarce have sold them for their weight in gold. And they gave it to be understood, that these their engines would shortly take Anguiscart, and not the swords of the gentlemen at arms.

Then when the engines were prepared, they pushed them up the sloping sward to the edge of the moat, to cover the great gate and its outworks. All joined in this, knights, esquires, and serjeants. They laid rollers, and pushed from behind with all their strength, and helped with levers and beams, while a great company of gentlemen of arms went on before, to guard them against any

sally. Palombris had espied out the land, and marked out the paths whereby they should go: and presently the engines were set up in their places, the arblast and a petraria against the barbican, to pierce a way into the donjon court, while the other petraria and the ram should breach the wall vail into the large court.

Now, Palombris had been working at these things for many hours without sleep, so now he went away to rest, leaving Giroflanz to begin the assault. But there came a mist drifting along the woods, with a light rain. And Anguis was regarding them shrewdly, and judged that the Constable was not there; so in the midst of the haze, when one man could but hardly see another, he threw open the gates of the barbican, and made a great onslaught, and did much damage to the engines ere ever he was driven off. It came about, because of these things, that when Palombris woke in the morning, nothing had been done, save damage, and the serjeants were displeased.

A wroth man was Palombris, when he understood this; but he set blame on none, and bade the engines be repaired. He himself climbed up into the petraria, and sat astride the cross beam, pointing out to the serjeants what they should do. Anguis perceived him, and all that day there were expert bowmen on the barbican towers, who shot at the Constable; but Palombris had up a serjeant with a shield, who sat behind him and warded off the arrows. And many times Palombris had need to take the work in hand himself, for none knew

his devices as he did himself, and the serjeant followed him about with the shield, hanging from one beam while Palombris climbed about on another. The gentlemen of arms were sad ; for the serjeants gave them plainly to wit where the blame lay ; but they said that at least they hoped to be in Anguiscart before the serjeants.

But the end of it was that the engines were repaired and set in order ; but a day had been lost, and that night news came to Palombris that the whole of the marches had risen, and were assembling as swiftly as might be, and would shortly come to raise the leaguer of Anguiscart. Of this, he said nothing.

Now they began. First they took the barbican, for the petraria cast huge stones against the gate, and broke it in, and the arblast cleared the galleries with its bolts ; and the gentlemen stormed the barbican, and drove out those within, who fled across the drawbridge into the castle. But ere they were driven out they set fire to the place ; and it burned away all night, so that none could approach the bridge head, and in the morning only the walls were left of the barbican, and the great gates were shut, and the portcullis was down, and the bridge raised before it. But all that night the serjeants were busy filling bags with earth and stones, and with the first dawn they began to build causeways across the moat, one beside the barbican, and the other against the wall vail. So hard they worked, that soon the causeways were

built ; but sore scathe to them did those within, for they cast fire balls, and shot arrows by the light thereof, and many a serjeant of the Blue Bull was slain or wounded. Nothing the more did they cry halt, but pressed on the fiercer.

That morning, word came to Palombris that the greatest of hosts was assembling to come to Anguiscart, and would shortly be on the way. It was said that their vanguard had taken the roads, and that Flacandrin led it. He called the chief men of the Blue Bull together, and told them this heavy news. They thought it but a black business, but said that they would trust to him, and never give way ; so they all agreed forthwith to push on the siege all they might. The causeway over by the barbican was finished, and the other was nigh to its end. Palombris had great shields built of wood, and pushed along the causeway, and behind these he brought up the arblast, and bade it be pointed at the drawbridge. Now while this was doing, he sent a company to push the other petraria towards the wall, and have the ram and the pent-house moved after it, to breach the wall ; and he bade them make much ado over that task, and to look as though the end of the world was coming nigh.

But on the causeway by the drawbridge he brought his tubes of Greek Fire, and set a great tow head on the bolt in the arblast. And when it was aimed, he lit it himself, and shot the bolt ; and the bolt flew, and fixed itself in the drawbridge, that was drawn up straight on high before the gate. Such a blaze that was, that no man had ever seen

the like ; for the Greek Fire flamed up furiously, and water scattered it about, but did not stop it ; yea, and the fire fell into the water in great sparks, but still went on burning. And when the men of the Blue Bull saw that, they were utterly astonished, and said, that the little Constable was working an enchantment : and the men in Anguiscart murmured together, and were sore afraid :

Then said Anguis : “ Ye are fools. This is Greek Fire, and nought else. If ye are geese, get ye down and roast yourselves at it.”

Thereupon he had the chains of the bridge cut through, and down fell the bridge, clear of the gates, and it burned away half the day long, till it was wholly consumed. But Palombris had built the causeway so that the bridge could not fall upon it ; and by reason thereof, the burning bridge did no harm, save that it scattered some of the fire. On this, Palombris had sand cast, and straightway the fire went out when the sand came upon it, and no hurt was done.

Thereupon Palombris set another tow head on a bolt, and laid the bolt in the arblast. And when the bridge was burnt out, and the way was clear, he lit the Greek Fire and shot the bolt into the portcullis, and straightway all the portcullis was on fire, and burnt as the bridge had done.

Anguis said : “ Wind up the portcullis.”

But when they sought to do this, the flame and the smoke came up in so deadly wise, that they were driven from the winches : for the winches were in a gallery over above.

Then said Anguis : “ Now I see the one error that was made in building this castle ; and I fear that it may destroy us.”

Now the flame spread from the portcullis to the gate itself, that lay behind it, and the gateway of Anguiscart was as a furnace of fire, burning without stint. The men of the Blue Bull sat and regarded it, how fiercely it burnt ; for all the gate towers and the works and galleries thereabout were full of fire and black smoke, and the smoke had a stench that slew those that breathed it.

Palombris appointed a watch, to see when the fire died down, and he bade a company of serjeants to go on with the ram, and to breach the wall into the great court, if so they might. But all others he commanded to withdraw, and they all went back to their campment, to rest before their assault at arms on the gateway, for he said that it should be in the morning, as soon as the fire was cold, and the sun gave them light. So all the men of the Blue Bull lay down to rest themselves, inasmuch as they knew well how stiff a stour that assault would be. And many made vows to accomplish it, or else they would die there.

But whenas he came to his tent, there stood a little company of knights who had been appointed to watch the roads and passages of the wood. They had with them a knight and a lady, and they said :

“ We have caught this knight and this lady, who sought to enter into Anguiscart. And we deem that there are many in the wood, who seek to enter if they may but find a passage.”

Palombris bade them be kept, and went on into the pavilion, and sat down with Giroflanz. And there was an esquire newly ridden in, who had come to tell them that the march host was on the way, and so many that there could not be less than eight thousand lances in it, all gentlemen bearing arms ; and esquires and serjeants withal. And he said, moreover, that Flacandrin and the vanguard were but thirty miles away, and journeying as swiftly as they ever might : and by now he deemed that the thirty would have dwindled somewhat.

They dismissed the esquire, and sat down to hold counsel together.

Then said Giroflanz : “ Thy wits will be hard tasked to get free of this net, Constable.”

“ Perchance it may prove hard,” said Palombris.

“ Let us break up the leaguer forthwith,” quoth Giroflanz, “ and set out to meet Flacandrin.”

“ That is counsel that needs pondering somewhat,” answered Palombris. “ For if we leave Anguis behind us, we shall not prevail over Flacandrin and his host.”

They talked over this a while ; and it seemed to them that the castle would surely fall, but that now they had little leisure to wait therefor, since the march host was close at hand.

Said Giroflanz : “ Let us storm Anguiscart to-morrow, and burn our engines, and defend ourselves therein.”

Palombris answered : “ There is no surety that we can achieve the castle ere Flacandrin is upon us ; for a shrewd captain is he, and witteth well

what case we are in. His last journey will be a long one, for such is the custom of skilled host leaders, and he may be here while we are in the midst of our storm ; and where then are we ? ”

Said Giroflanz : “ Then it cometh hereto, that we must have the mastery of Anguiscart before morning. Let us make a night assault.”

Palombris answered : “ That is a right perilous counsel, for night assaults mean the loss of many a man. Nay, I desire that we may be prepared to fight a battle after Anguiscart is fallen : for if it falls, the march host will melt as summer snow, and we shall not be outnumbered. To this end I came hither : for we must have the head off the serpent, and then the tail cannot sting us.”

Then said Giroflanz : “ I am at the end of my wits. Devise thou what thou wilt ; I shall be ready for my own part, for I know that some blame lieth at my door over this business. But it seems to me that we must be in Anguiscart by morning, or flee, or perish.”

Palombris said he would ponder over it ; and Giroflanz went away.

CHAPTER IX. OF THE SILVER TRANCE OF PALOMBRIS

A STRANGE, wild sunset was dying out over the woods of Anguiscart ; the pallor of the sky, and the rent and torn look of the clouds, threatened an high wind to come, but the land was still, and little sound came across it. Palombris lay down upon

his bed, and began to think deeply ; for this night, he knew, would be the great moment of his life, and all would turn on what came of it. If the castle of Anguiscart were not his by morning, he was a fugitive and a man of nought ; yea, he himself might end his life there, and never see Pallogris again, and she would grieve for him, and find no one to comfort her as he could comfort her. Yet as he lay there, he felt no fear. He wondered why this should be, but though he told himself that this was the time for dread and fear, they did not come to him. Instead, he sank into a deep study, which seemed as if it had nought at all to do with the matter in hand.

Twice he roused himself, saying that he must not dream idly ; but each time he fell back into his thoughts ; and when the third time came, he let it pass, being full of his own fancies.

So he lay and thought, and in his mind saw Pallogris as he had left her aforetime. Often he had let this memory flit across his mind ; but now it seemed clearer than ever before, and he could count each hair of her head, and see the colour of her eyes, and trace each line of her face, so that it was a great wonder and delight to him, and he was happy thereat, and smiled. But presently, while he regarded her steadily, she changed little by little, albeit he could never see the change come about ; and after a while she was different, and seemed taller, and although she was the same Pallogris, she was grown and ripened with years, and sat thinking. He asked himself whether he

liked her better or worse for the change, and after considering for a long time, he thought that she was more beautiful than of old, and in all ways more desirable to his heart. When he had settled this, straightway a great joy entered into him, and spread through all his body, and he could have swooned with the greatness of that joy. And there grew a light as of clear silver, the most beautiful light in the world, and he was amidst it, and bathed in it.

Then in his mind he saw Pallogris turn her head and regard him, and they spoke together very sweetly ; their lips moved, and they knew each the mind of the other, but no words went with it, nor could he ever call to mind what they said, save that it was more solacing than any words could be. And so close their hearts drew to one another, that Palombris felt himself drawn away out of himself, and he slipped into a trance that was neither sleeping nor waking, so that he lay very still with wide-open eyes, drifting from all knowledge of where he was, into a strange world where Pallogris was.

She spoke to him without any will of his ; and he asked her what he should do. She said nothing, but smiled upon him ; and presently asked him of what he was afraid.

He started, and answered : " It is true that I was afraid : but it was of doing that which might end in unhappiness."

She said : " No good thing wisely done ends so."

He answered : " Ah, it is not so simple, for it is

the deepest of questions whether any thing is wisely done, however good it be."

So she smiled upon him, and said : " Well, then, —no good thing simply done ends so."

He thought that he must explain this to himself : and he went on to do so, and said : " There is ever a destined thing, the thing of things, which is out of all others that one pointed to by the will of God ; and it is the blessed thing to do, so that whosoever is lucky or wise enough to do it, is rewarded more richly than other men. And it is this to which we drift easily and simply when we forget life and death, and think only of love and the straight path of honour."

" Yea," said she ; " so that if thou doest that thing, never needst thou fear either for me or for thee : for whatsoever springs forth of it, it will work out for good, and even the uttermost good ; which is beyond the understanding of our minds."

He said : " But what will it be, in this case ? I look, and I know not what thing it can be."

She answered him : " Is not a man entrapped by his own desires ?—so that they who delight in the good fall into the net of God, and they who love the evil, into the Devil's net."

" True is that," said he.

So she said to him : " Then those things are the bait for Anguis which his heart desires,—women and wealth. For if he loveth not these, he will not fall into the net ; and if he falleth into it, judged is he out of his own mouth."

" True," said Palombris again.

Then said Pallogris : “ See then if he may so be caught.”

Palombris leaped up suddenly, in a dew of sweat, that drenched him as though he had lain under a warm rain : and he was as a man drunk with wine, for he was full of a wondrous bliss and radiance, that bathed him as with bright light, and caused his heart to tremble ; but his limbs were as steel. He went forth of the pavilion, and paced to and fro in the cool of the evening.

Then one man of the Blue Bull, looking upon him, said to another : “ Luck still swims with us, for the Constable is of high heart.”

Said the other : “ He hath lit upon somewhat, for never have I seen a gladder face than that.”

And they spread this about.

But Palombris went back into the pavilion, and meditated, and he came to the conclusion anon that he had not in truth seen Pallogris ; but that the one he spoke with was rather some angel of wisdom, who had put on the shape that he thought of and cared for most, that he might counsel him. And he thought that it might be the angel of Pallogris.

And afterwards he said to himself : “ It may be that her angel is also mine, so that we have but one angel between us, and are guided by one power ; and then if that should be so, I deem that all things are ordered for good unto her, and I have but to obey the angel to that end, and find my luck therein.”

And he fixed it in his mind, that whatsoever came of the matter, he would so read the tale of it.

CHAPTER X. OF THE KNIGHT AND THE DAME THAT CAME TO ANGUIS IN ANGUISCART

THAT evening, when it was dark, a knight and his dame came riding in to Anguiscart. The great gate was yet red and fiery, and none might pass it ; but when Anguis had looked forth upon them, and regarded them closely, he had a sally port opened, and took them in through the postern.

He knew them well, and had joy to see them, for the knight held a fee of him. And they said :

“ Sir, know this truly, that we have waited for five days and nights in the wood, seeking to come to you, but we could not. But to-night, the Blue Bull hath withdrawn itself, and we think hath begun to give up the leaguer ; so we ventured, and have got through as you behold. Moreover, Flacandrin is but one long day’s journey hence, and shortly you shall be rescued.”

A glad man was Anguis, and he deemed this the best of good tidings. So he haled them in, and embraced them tenderly, and bade his butler bring out the best wine, for they would sup well over that good news.

But while they were still rejoicing, and the butler was seeking the keys of the cellar, another knight came in, well known to Anguis ; and he said likewise, and said also, that the march host was a mighty great one, if men reported truly.

So Anguis said : “ Things go better than I looked for. It seemeth as if we had planned too

well to be overthrown of the Blue Bull. But we will be careful, whereas a deep and crafty man is the little Constable."

He put watchers on all the towers ; but the men of the Blue Bull had withdrawn themselves, and the causeways lay dark and empty. And certain men who crept out privily to espy the land came back and said that the engines had been dismantled, so that they could no more be used. They brought back an iron from the arblast, to prove it.

Said Anguis : " This looks well ; yet we will be careful, and in no wise hasty. We will wait for Flacandrin, for a cunning man is the little Constable, and deeper than a draw-well."

Now, folk kept on coming in until it was nigh unto midnight, and all told the same tale ; for many a man of Anguis had been lurking in the woods, waiting to come to him. And no few had brought their dames with them for safety. Some of these were known to Anguis, but some were not well known ; but he took them all in, for now there was little to fear, and those he knew not were too few to do harm, even though they had all been men of the Blue Bull. So they all sat down to table, and were joyous.

The wine of Anguis was fine and subtle, and it warmed their hearts apace ; a merry hall they made that night, and Anguis was glad, and the wine made him gracious and eager, and he smiled sweetly upon all the dames, and spoke flattering words, for he was smooth of tongue to women,

when his mind turned that way. There was a dame whom he knew not with any acquaintance ; a tall and shapely woman, wimpled up to her eyes, and those eyes were blue grey, and marvellously laughing and handsome. Her he picked out, and kept his glance upon. Truly, she was worthy of note, and said many things that caused Anguis to listen, for he loved keen wit, and biting jests. So after a while he left his high seat, and walked up and down the table, speaking to his guests, and hearking to the raillery of that dame. And presently he filled her cup, and brought her precious comfits from his own store, sugar plums, and the like. And he fell to smiling upon her with great favour, and she ate his plums, and smiled back over her wimple with those wondrous blue grey eyes ; but now and again she seemed to shrink, and would not look upon him.

Anguis deemed her somewhat past her first youth, for there were little lines at the corners of her eyes ; but he cared nothing as to that, thinking women the better, indeed, when they were rid of their girlhood. And he sat with his elbow on the table before him, his head askew, biting his thumb-nail, and letting his mind run on that dame.

Now at some time there fell to be an empty place next to Anguis ; so he waited, and beckoned to her, and she came and sat beside him. Most gracious he was, handing her sugar plums and fine raisins, and ginger that was worth its weight in gold. She ate them all up, and was glad, and they conversed all this while.

He said : " Wilt thou not take off thy wimple ? "

" Some things are best unseen," said she.

" That is not so with thee, I will lay my head," quoth Anguis, " for there is no woman here as fair as thou. May I not see thee, and have pleasure ? "

She looked away, but anon turned again, and said :

" Art thou very eager for that ? "

" Most eager," said he, smiling.

She said : " Then give me another sugar plum ? "

He laughed, and gave her a whole box into her lap, and they went on playing with words, for she would not show herself, yet kept Anguis lured and delighted, and sure in his heart that this was the most desirable of women.

At last she said : " Well, then, but I will show thee if I may do it unseen of others, secretly ; for that is the best amusement. But look thou at my lord. Is he not exceeding glum and glowering ? "

Anguis was in high good humour, and said : " No doubt he is a worthy man ; but dull, me-seemeth."

" Most dull," quoth the dame. " Now, I will tell thee a thing that thou wilt scarce believe."

" What is that ? " he asked.

She said : " Dost thou know what the little Constable is planning to do ? For it is said that he intends to disperse, and send each man home in his own ways ; so that when Flacandrin comes, lo, there will be nought to fight, but the Blue Bull will gather elsewhere. And by token, he hath buried his treasure in the wood ; a mighty great one."

“How dost thou know that?” demanded Anguis; for it seemed to him very like the craft of the Constable to do a thing of this kind.

“We saw him do it,” answered the dame. “We were in the wood, and saw them bring great boxes, and dig a hole to bury them therein. But none wit of that save we two. Now I will bid thee ask my lord thereof, and have surety.”

All was gold to Anguis in that hour. The dame held out a sugar plum, and put it into his mouth, and he ate it, and said: “Couldst thou find the place again?”

“I know not,” she answered, “but he could. Ask him; or else come on the battlements.”

Anguis was right willing, for he saw his way ahead to the two things he delighted in most. He smiled, and began to weave dreams in his heart. A short while he sat debating with himself. So it befell that lust and covetousness laid hold of Anguis, and when he studied, it seemed a lucky night to him, and he rose up, and put his arm through the dame’s arm, and said:

“Come now, let us speak together.”

Anguis had been walking about the room oft times that night, and none noted whither he went now; nor was he a man lightly to be questioned. All folk were merry, and the wine was bright, and Anguis brought the dame to a door hidden behind the tapestried hangings. The knight watched them, and when Anguis pushed aside the hangings, he came to them.

“Ha,” quoth Anguis, grimly, “thou art as like

the little Constable as one pea is like another." And he thought himself drunker than he had fancied, and laughed.

"So all men say," quoth the knight. He seemed a glum man, and this entertained Anguis, who said :

"Come hither, man ; for I desire to speak with you. I will see that profit comes of it."

He pushed the knight in through the door, and followed with the dame ; then they were in a narrow passage, lit by one dim lamp, and he pointed on along it, and said : "Open the further door."

So the knight walked on along the passage, and Anguis came after with the dame : and Anguis was as a dove for sweetness. Surely no man might have shown greater courtesy and grace than he did to that dame ; and she for her part shrank somewhat, and yet not so much but that Anguis perceived that she was well disposed towards him. And thereat he was elated, and smiled with great content, and his heart was stirred. Then when they came to the dark part where the door lay, the knight needed to feel for the bolts, to withdraw them, and Anguis took the dame's arm afresh, and drew her to him, as though to guide her towards the door, for none of them could clearly see it.

She trembled and shook : Anguis could feel it, and that drove out of his mind the wonder he had at the thickness of her arm, for he called to mind that some women are thicker built than others, and none the worse therefor. But at her trembling

he forgot even this, and thought all only of what should come. So the door was opened, and they went forth upon the gallery, where the air was clear and cold, and the sky was full of stars, but all about was a black darkness.

The dame held fast to Anguis, and said : " O, I fall."

" Nay," said he, " there is a six-foot parapet all around us. This is the outer gate tower."

Quoth the knight : " The wind draws in over hard " : and he drew the door to. It was a thick door, studded and clamped with iron.

Now the fresh air began to blow the wine out of the wits of Anguis, and he was as a man who wakens from a dream, and wonders whither he is come. For a little space he stood there ; and the darkness cleared somewhat, so that he could perceive the forms of things ; and the dame clasped him with her arms, so that thereby he was still rooted to his dream. But when he heard the door click to and catch, all this fled utterly, and he awoke.

" Ha," quoth he, fiercely, " what is this that ye do ? "

The dame tightened her grip on him, and slid down to his feet ; and the knight sprang swiftly at him and wrapped round his throat two very strong arms that held Anguis as if in a blacksmith's vice. He struggled amain, and opened his lips to shout, but as soon as he opened them, the knight slipped in a cross-shaped gag, and held it there. A fierce and grim fight was waged there in the dark, for a powerful man of his hands was Anguis, and

they needed to wrench his poignard away from him. But shortly the knight arose, and the dame also arose, and there was Anguis, pinioned and gagged at their feet.

Then Palombris took out a flare, and lit it : and it burned away for a space on the parapet. Anguis saw him, and knew him now, and cursed the hour he was born. But the dame had arisen, and was shredding off her garments, and slowly Anguis perceived that it was no woman, but a fresh-faced young man, smooth of chin and with a woman's voice. Anguis became sick of heart, and had no more joy in any thing at all. He could have wept for sorrow and rage. But when the flare had died down, a blunt arrow flew up and fell into the gallery. A string was tied to it, and the string drew a rope.

Giroflanz lay against the parapet, white as man could be : and he said : " I shall wake up often in the night, dreaming hereof ; for now that I have done this, I know what fear is."

Palombris affixed the rope to the parapet, and answered :

" It is the mark of the valiant man that his will is stronger than his fear. Bear thyself up now, Giroflanz : for we do not know whether any man hath seen this light."

Then Giroflanz roused himself, and they let Anguis down to the serjeants who waited below in the moat ; and afterwards he himself slid down, and last of all Palombris followed, and they swam

and waded across the water, helped by the sergeants, till they came to the dry land. And all this while, none in Anguiscart knew one whit of these deeds, for they went on making merry and drinking high, and they asked not after Anguis, nor dreamed of any ill.

CHAPTER XI. IN WHAT WISE THEY TOOK THE CASTLE OF ANGUISCART

PALOMBRIS slept not that night. Giroflanz, as soon as he was stripped of his wet clothes, flung himself down upon the Constable's bed, and fell asleep, and slept till morning. Twice he woke, crying out with horror, but Palombris went to him forthwith, and towards day he fell into a deep sleep, and moved no more. Palombris took the gag from Anguis, and sat down to watch him, for while Anguis was there, not for one minute would he close eye, lest the prize escape him therewithal. And since neither of them slept, they presently slipped into speech together.

"Well, Constable," quoth Anguis, "ye have outwitted me, and shamed me. What will ye do now?"

"I am not certain in my mind," answered Palombris. "But it may be that some evil for thee is mixed therewith, in any case. None the less, it will be lighter than what would have come to me, had I fallen into thine hands."

"I believe you well, Constable," quoth Anguis. Then he fell into a great rage, and writhed and said: "O fool, fool, fool; why did I do that? Why

did I throw away my life so lightly, without any need at all ? ”

Palombris said to him : “ Know ye not, Anguis, that every man works his own doom ? The pit ye fall into, ye yourself dig ; ye yourself ravel the knot that hangs you, and ye whet the sword of your own destruction. Ninety and nine times ye followed a woman lightly, but the hundredth time she was the host-leader of the Blue Bull.”

“ Thy wisdom be on thine own head,” quoth Anguis.

“ I will not put that aside,” answered Palombris. “ I am in the hands of God. He who standeth therein shall not stumble, for to that man there is greater happiness in the depth of hell than to thee, Anguis, in the height of heaven.”

“ I know all these things,” said Anguis, “ and there is nought in them. Luck goeth one way and another way ; it goeth well for you now, and then again for me. But luck is unsafe to build on.”

“ Then why build on it ? ” demanded Palombris.

“ What else is there to build on ? ” quoth Anguis.

Palombris said : “ Nothing that I know of. For I see the drift of it, and thou seest the drift of it, and we differ as to the reading of the riddle. Well, we can let that rest. We shall see what cometh thereof.”

“ I understand thee not,” said Anguis.

Said Palombris : “ I meant only this, that as a man stakes on the throw of the dice, so do we stake on the last end and doom of man. And now we wait to see who is in the right.”

Anguis was silent, and uneasy. But after a while he spoke and said : " I have not been such a fool as ye deem, Constable : nor have I lived lightly, without foresight. Nay, but rather have I had mine own ways of thought, and done as they taught me."

" The proof of the pudding is in the eating," answered Palombris.

" Art thou a happy man, Constable ? " demanded Anguis.

" I have much that pleases me," said Palombris. " Not but that there are some things I should like bettered."

" Ye cold and chaste men," said Anguis, " are not at root so ready for heaven as we that are of warmer blood. I will grant that we sometimes take too much of a good thing ; but what of you, who take none ? "

Palombris answered : " Ye are in the mist of an illusion, Anguis. Never yet hast thou loved a woman, or known what love is at all. Ye have taken too much of shadows."

" Constable," quoth Anguis, " I am rejoiced that I may have this speech with thee, for thou art a man out of many, and hast proved thyself in hard deeds. Now tell me without falsehood whether thou hast had as good a life as I ? "

" In many ways," answered Palombris, " I have had a good life, and although I am young, and have had but a short time as yet wherein to test and try, yet I doubt whether thy life hath been as full of pleasure as mine. Thou mayst have had the more, but then I have had the better. Ye know well that

some harsh things, such as the toils and labours of war, are joys to the man of valiant heart, so that he looks back on them with delight ; now this is true also in other ways. For I think that he who lives an easy life, and pleases himself with small things, findeth not that pleasure which comes to the man who lives hard, and seeks only the big things."

"I understand thee well enough," said Anguis. "But there are some things I know, that thou knowest not, since nought but experience can teach them. Women are so made that they will not rest until they have destroyed even those that they love. Thou art deeming that they can be held and conquered by sweetness and kind service ; but be sure of this, that they can only be deceived thereby. No woman can ever be held or ruled at all. Their vanity is a bottomless pit, wherein many a good man has been lost. Therefore a wise man doeth that which is safest ; he steals from them what he can, and avoids the hook under the bait."

Palombris answered : "What thou sayest is true of all women save one ; and as to that one, I counsel thee to find her, and swallow the hook even though it be unbaited."

"Nay, I shall never find her," said Anguis.

Palombris answered : "Thou goest the wrong way to work about it, and therefore thy task is bungled from the outset."

"How so ?" demanded Anguis.

"Thus," said Palombris ; "I trouble my head little concerning how I should hold or conquer a woman. I wandered abroad, and found a realm ;

and I serve that realm to better it, and do for it what I may. Perchance I shall wander abroad in days to come, and find a woman ; and I shall do with her as I did with the realm. For it is all of a piece ; ye fight and war one against another, and your realm falleth to pieces, and no man is happy therefor ; and ye love here and there, and stray from one woman to another, and your life is unloosed, and ye find no lasting solace. But I will do alike to both, serving where I may ; and I shall not ask leave thereto, nor yet demand my wages."

"I was not built that way," said Anguis.

"Ye have lacked understanding," answered Palombris. "Ye have chosen small things rather than great. Ye have eaten sour grapes, and your teeth are set on edge."

"Thou art a strange man, Constable," said Anguis. "Why should a man go without wages, or love without demanding any return ?"

"The world is so made," answered Palombris, "that ye may have it one way or the other, to your liking ; namely, ye may demand your wages, and gain them, and no more, or else ye may dispense with them, and stake on the chance of gaining both them and all else."

"The chance is a narrow one," said Anguis.

"Not so narrow as ye think," said Palombris. "Ye are blind gamesters, ye men. Ye know not what treasure is secretly handed forth to those who ask nothing. But why should I speak thereof ? Truly, the paths are hard paths ; I will not boast until I am out of the wood."

Anguis regarded him as though with suspicion.

"Nay," he said, "but go on speaking, for this conversation is one I would not miss."

But Palombris seemed to have grown silent.

"I deem the truth to be," quoth Anguis, "that thou art not altogether as sure on this matter as thou hast made pretence of being."

"Time tries all things," said Palombris, shortly.

"What is it that thou art afraid of?" demanded Anguis.

After a while, Palombris made answer and said :

"If I had the strength of a giant and the wisdom of Solomon, and the patience of Job, I should fear nothing; but I am less than this, wherefore I am not sure of myself. I may be too small a man to carry heaven on my back. Yea, I have heard of men who won a dragon's hoard, and were buried and slain under the plenitude of their wealth. It may be so with me."

"Ha," quoth Anguis, in surprise. "Ye are a bold man, Constable. Never erstwhile did I hear a man say such a thing."

"I will relate to thee a tale," said Palombris. "There was a man who found a great hoard in a hill; so much gold was there, that a hundred waggons could not have carried it away. So he took out a ring of gold, and went away to gain help, for he was willing that other men should share in it, if he might but have his own share. But it was elf gold, and whosoever looked upon that ring laughed at him, for to them it seemed but old iron, of little

worth. So that man never gained any help to bear away the gold, and unto this day all of it is his."

"Thou shouldst have been a bishop, Constable," said Anguis. "But why did the tale fall out so?"

"Forsooth," answered Palombris, "all the best kind of gold is magic, and those who give it are not willing that it should be shared save by the friends of the elfin-folk. So to all others it is as dross, and they laugh at it."

Anguis regarded him for long; and during that while they said nothing.

Then said Anguis: "I will not lie to thee, Constable. I have great affection for the common sort of gold, and for the common sort of kiss: and a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Palombris smiled, and answered: "It does not always end well."

"Whereof I am a proof," quoth Anguis; and he fell into a passion, and writhed and struggled like a mad man; yet he knew not clearly why, save that he was wroth with all things.

When he had ceased, Palombris stepped to him, and tightened his bonds.

"I am no monk," said Palombris. "I am but the Constable of Barbizen, and I do the things that I do, because I care most for them. It should have been well for thee hadst thou cared for them also. But I will cast nothing in thy teeth. Thou shalt be judged in those matters by God; I will judge thee only as a man taken in arms against his lord, and a foe to the realm. For what else art thou to the Constable of Barbizen?"

Anguis said to him : " I must abide it. There is wisdom in thee, Constable ; so much I see clearly."

" Well," said Palombris, " it so fell out, that we were matched against one another ; and there is no denying that I have had the better, so far. Yet I have demanded nothing of thee save peace in the realm, and loyalty, and care for our old customs."

" There is nought to be said against that," answered Anguis. " One man or another must rule ; and it seemeth to be thou that art fated to do so."

And after this, they both fell silent, and dawn grew over the woods.

When the men of the Blue Bull understood that Anguis was in their encampment, they were amazed ; and then they fell into such joy that they knew not what they did. Palombris came forth at dawn, and stripped, and had a serjeant to pour buckets of water over him from a brook, and to rub him with a towel.

Then he said : " This shall count as a night's sleep."

Now they cleared their campment, and were in high heart. Diverse watchers came in ere the sun rose, and said that Flacandrin was but twenty miles off, and lying ready for the road. And they also said that a good fighting ground lay not five miles from them. Palombris bade all men prepare themselves, and he himself was armed.

Then the Blue Bull sent to demand of Palombris in what wise they should array themselves that day ; for it was reported that the host had arrayed itself in its finest clothes.

Palombris answered : " Wear whatsoever is oldest that ye have, ye that are not fey. We will have out our bravery on the day wherein we enter Barbizen."

They were pleased therewith ; and swiftly the campment was broken up. Palombris sent forth a company to find Flacandrin, and to pitch upon a battlefield, and he bade them publish it widely that Anguis was in the Constable's hands ; but the rest of the Blue Bull came with him to the gates of Anguiscart.

There they blew a trump, and parleyed.

Palombris said to them : " I pray you call forth Anguis to speak with me."

They went to seek him ; but after a while they returned, and answered that he would doubtless be coming anon ; for they could not find him, and were somewhat distraught in mind.

Palombris bade Anguis be brought, and said to them : " Know ye this man ? "

They looked upon him, and straightway knew him, and were as men thunderstruck.

Palombris said to them : " Now yield ye the castle of Anguiscart, or Anguis dieth forthwith."

They dared not refuse ; so it came about that to save their lord's life they yielded up the castle.

Palombris dismissed them all, and left none of them behind, bidding them go to Flacandrin. And when he had put men of the Blue Bull to hold the castle, he called for his destrier, and set out with the host of the Blue Bull to meet Flacandrin.

CHAPTER XII. OF THE BATTLE AGAINST THE MARCH HOST

FLACANDRIN pressed on all he might, with a very great company of men, for he purposed to come before the castle of Anguiscart by noon, if he could contrive as much ; and in all things he did as Palombris had foreseen. But ere the morning was far gone, and while he was yet some leagues from Anguiscart, the foremost of his riders began to find the men of the Blue Bull before them ; first as small companies seen afar off on hill tops, and presently as scrimmishers who crossed a spear or two with them, and rode fast away when their friends came to their rescue. And at last they found a great force in front of them, all marshalled in a glade : and thereat they sent back to ask Flacandrin what they should do, and in the meantime they waited.

The men of the Blue Bull said to them : “ Ho, messires, have a care whither you come, for your journey is vain. Anguiscart is taken, and the lord Anguis is in the hands of the little Constable.”

The riders of the march host liked this little ; but when Flacandrin was come, and had looked upon the land, and heard what was reported, he said : “ This is like to be a trick. Believe not what they say, till we have sure word thereof.” So he pushed on by other roads, and the men of the Blue Bull rode away to seek safer ground. In this manner they went, the march host pressing on, and the Blue Bull scrimmishing with them, but falling back, until

all the roads ran together, and Flacandrin saw that the companies of the Blue Bull had joined themselves there. He took counsel ; but all those who knew the land well were of one mind, that no other roads led to Anguiscart, and this passage must be won by arms. And this place was a wide smooth heath, where sheep had grazed the grass short.

Flacandrin began to array his company, for he did not deem that there was any need to await the rest of the host. The knights of the Blue Bull rode up close, and cried to them : “ Your journey is in vain, for Anguiscart hath fallen to the little Constable,” the which greatly troubled the men of the host : and there were many combats fought there, and Flacandrin delayed his advance, that he might speak with his lords, and get them into better minds. For they said : “ Our journey will be fruitless if the Constable has taken the lord Anguis : and perchance it were better to wait for our friends, and hear what they say.”

Flacandrin answered : “ Much more will it be fruitless if ye tarry here in doubt, and allow the little Constable to make good his boast.”

But at last they saw a great rout of folk coming along a road, both men and women, and after them the banner of the Constable, and the main host of the Blue Bull, all armed and mounted, a mighty great company.

“ See what ye have done,” quoth Flacandrin. “ For ye might have defeated the men before you, but now we are so well matched that the issue will be doubtful.”

And this was no comfort at all to them.

Then came all that rout of folk towards the array of Flacandrin, crying out : “ Sirs, do us no hurt : we are your friends. We have been dismissed from Anguiscart, and the lord Anguis is a prisoner in the hands of the little Constable.”

The men of the host answered them : “ Ah, sirs, this is the heaviest news we have ever heard : we have never had sadder news than this.” And some of them were so downcast, that Flacandrin bade his camp be pitched, for he would await the coming of the main host : and late in the afternoon it began to come in, so many that scarce could it have been counted ; and it pitched its camp behind Flacandrin’s.

But when the news had spread, and those who had come from Anguiscart had spoken to the men of the host, and told them all that had come to pass, such a fear came upon men as might not be stayed. The leaders of the host assembled, and agreed that they would go on with the enterprise ; but while they did this, their people fled away by twos and threes. All the roads were black with men departing hastily to their own homes. Then some of the great lords of Barbizen, who were in the host, bethought them that this journey was doomed to an ill end, and they went away with all their folk, and others followed them. The greater part of the lords of Barbizen did thus : but a few, who were of bolder heart, stayed. So many men left the host, that it swiftly dwindled, and in the morning those who stayed behind saw that their friends were leaving them.

The host-leaders assembled afresh, and this time they were fewer than before.

Said Flacandrin : “ This is the worst of trusting to you men of Barbizen : ye are but broken reeds to lean on. Had all men stayed, we had been safe enough.”

They excused their friends as best they might. Then they agreed to put out of the host all men who were half-hearted ; for Flacandrin said that he would not lead them unless he knew surely that they would follow him. So when they had sent home all who were not keen, the host was greatly dwindled, but all those in it were bitter foes of the Constable, and many of them had sworn the oath at the Sweet Winds the year before, and looked for nothing but death if they were caught.

This while the Blue Bull lay in their camp over against the host, and they perceived well how it dwindled, and how men departed away from it. Palombris was in no haste, for he deemed that the longer they let the host talk among itself, the fewer it would be, and so it proved. But when he understood that Flacandrin had gathered out a company who intended to make a fierce battle, he had his trumpets blown, and marshalled the Blue Bull ready, in three great battles. He devised the marshalling himself, setting the right-hand battle under Giroflanz, and the mid-most battle under Andreas, the banner-bearer of the Blue Bull ; and Palombris led the left-hand battle, with all the serjeants gathered behind him. A most glorious

array they made, of fierce and hardy men, all well armed and mounted on good horses.

Palombris taught them all what they should do, and what to look for. He rode up and down, saying : "Sirs : this is the greatest field of arms ye have ever been in, for your foes are many more than ye be. Ye shall make or mar your names this day, and if ye do well, ye shall get the greatest honour and fame therefrom."

The knights and esquires answered : "Sir, we will do our best, by the help of God."

Then the sons of Grimol of Greensheaves said to him : "Sir, we will never come off this field without the victory."

But the grandsons of old Pied-à-Feu said to him :

"Sir, we dare not go home to our house, and report that the Constable lost a battle, but we did not die therein."

And at that many men smiled.

Palombris said to the serjeants : "I have bidden you what ye shall do. I look to you to do well."

"Ye shall not look in vain, Constable," said they.

Now the march host took the field, and was marshalled, and it was much greater than the Blue Bull, and finely arrayed : and Flacandrin rode in the mid-most on a cream coloured destrier, the goodliest of men to behold. And when the trumpets had been blown up, and helms closed, and lances laid in rest, the Blue Bull moved over the green grass and began their onslaught.

Forthwith Giroflanz set on at the right hand, and so fiercely he led his battle, that they broke through

the battle that stood before them, and scattered it, and pursued it, and drove it as wind drives the leaves. The boldest of horsemen was Giroflanz, and the best of host-leaders. He never drew rein till he had entered into the campment of the host, and sent the camp-folk flying. But then he blew his trumpets, and returned to the field.

Now the strife had been fiercer where Palombris fought; for thither Flacandrin had gathered the best of his knights, men who hated the Constable exceedingly, and were fain of his death. A great shock of war befell around Palombris, and for a while no man could tell how matters promised, or who looked like to have the mastery. When Flacandrin perceived the Constable, he rode hither and thither, crying: "Flock to me, all who may"; and a great many of men came against the Constable. There was a fierce mêlée, and many men slipped down, and did not soon rise up, for there fought the most valiant men, and the grimmest of heart, and close was the press about Palombris. Thirty armed knights were on the ground, and he was one of them; and those behind might not readily come to their help.

Now came the serjeants, that had been watching where to strike in. They came through the mid-most of the battle, and passed between the knights, for they were on foot, and could enter where the riders might not.

Then cried the host, mockingly: "Where is the Constable?"

There was a huge serjeant, that formerly had been a blacksmith. He bore a heavy blacksmith's

hammer, wherewith he smote down on the right hand and on the left, and those on whom it lit fell suddenly to the earth, and did not lightly arise again. Forthwith he came, and the knights behind pointed to where the Constable lay. The serjeant found him, and cried out aloud :

“ Here is the Constable ” : and they had great joy, and drew him forth whole and smiling, and still grasping Kol’s sword.

While this befell, Giroflanz rode up with his battle, and came round behind the host ; and there he marshalled his knights, and blew up his trumpets and made ready ; and now the Blue Bull had the host between its horns, and the stour was stiff. Flacandrin bade his knights light down off their horses, in front of the Constable, and the knights of the Blue Bull flung their reins to their pages, and lit down likewise, and braced themselves to fight on foot.

Then the hammer-man took Palombris by an arm, and another serjeant took him by the other arm, and they hove him up on high, armed as he was, clean into the midst of Flacandrin’s array ; and the hammer-man cried : “ Here is the Constable : to the rescue, serjeants.” And he broke into their array, wielding his hammer, and the serjeants began to enter in, for Palombris struck out valiantly, and held his own until the serjeants came to him, and fierce fighting was that.

This saw Andreas, and he rose in his stirrup and cried so that all heard him : “ Up, rouse ye, mesires, or the serjeants will be in before us, and rob us of all honour.” Then the gentlemen of arms in

his battle set on afresh like madmen, for none of them desired the serjeants to have the honour of that bout ; and so fiercely they fought that they recked nothing at all of their lives, or of wounds, and it was easy to see afterwards, by the many who fell there, that this was the place of the hardest strife. Andreas cried them on, naming the names of those who did most valiantly ; and they fought and smote and fell, till the spears of the host were overborne by the weight of those who crowded upon them, and two knights, scarce more than boys, won their way into the packed array, and the press began to be broken up.

Flacandrin came with men drawn from other parts of the host, to restore the fight ; but then the serjeants began to break in on their own part, and the knights of Palombris' battle, who were on foot, supported them, and all was turmoil, and confusion, and mingling. So Flacandrin perceived that nothing he could do would now save the host, for some were fleeing, and were driven back by Giroflanz, and many of the leaders of the host were fallen. He lit down from his horse, and drew his sword to defend himself.

Never was a fiercer fight than this, for the most part of the march host fell where they stood, or were captured. Around Flacandrin gathered the men who yet held out, and dared not yield. Palombris saw in the forefront of that band a figure which he knew well, all armed in blue, with little golden tears over the azure, but it was not now as it had been formerly, when last he saw it, for now it

was Flacandrin who stood alone, and the fighting men of Palombris that ringed him round. He grasped a sword in both hands, and that sword was as a flail and a winnowing blast to separate the souls of men. Ever he cried : " Keep ye steady : give no ground : fight on " ; and many a man of the Blue Bull bit the dust at his feet. But presently came the hammer-man, and smote Flacandrin with all his force ; and the blow lit on Flacandrin's helm, and he made no bones about falling, but fell very suddenly to the ground, and it was long or ever he rose again. Then a charge of the gentlemen at arms scattered the band of fighting men, and the serjeants took them, and the battle came to an end. The men of the Blue Bull went about searching for some one to fight, but there were no more.

But in the midst thereof a bitter strife of words arose between the serjeants and diverse of the gentlemen, for each side claimed to have been the first to break into Flacandrin's array, and they contended together.

Palombris came walking by on foot, and the serjeants with great wrath and indignation appealed to him.

" Constable," said they, " ye were with us. Answer whether it is not true that we were the first men to enter."

" The gentlemen entered first," quoth Palombris, " for ye threw me in yourselves."

At that was much laughter, and the serjeants were somewhat crestfallen. So Palombris consoled

them, and said that they could count him as a serjeant, if so they wished. They thanked him, but said that they would call it a fair quittance all round; and the contention dropped, and arose no more.

CHAPTER XIII. OF THE DEVICES OF FLACANDRIN

PALOMBRIS bade his pavilion be brought nearer to the field, for it was long ere he had had any sweet rest, and now he was minded to sleep his fill. And while they were pitching the pavilion, he stood and caused all the prisoners to be brought before him. There were a many, and some walked by themselves swordless and unhelmed, and some were helped along on the arm or shoulder of a serjeant, and others were carried on litters. Many had hoped to be able to deny that they had sworn the oath of fealty at the Sweet Winds, and no few dreaded to be accused thereof unjustly. But Palombris had a king's remembrance, and asked no questions of any of them; for he knew them all straightway, who had sworn at the Sweet Winds, and these he bade be put aside, and he would listen to nothing from them. But those who had not sworn he commanded to hold to ransom and fine; and to speak shortly of these, they all of them paid, and took oath of fealty to the King, and went home again, much the poorer in purse, and in no mind to try any more strife with the Constable.

But when Flacandrin passed before him, Palombris said: "We are old foes, Flacandrin."

"Thou hast paid thy debts then, Constable," quoth he, smiling. "But how dost thou make that out?"

Palombris showed him the iron buckle, and answered: "I do not think that thou hast wholly forgotten this."

"Ho," said Flacandrin, staring at him. "The boy with the iron buckle is grown into the little Constable of Barbizen. Truly, I am glad to know that tale."

But Palombris said: "What shall I do with thee, Flacandrin? Thou hast no lands to swear homage for, nor any allegiance to Barbizen. Thou art a lawless man, and a reiver and a spoiler."

"That is true," quoth Flacandrin.

"Wilt thou take lands of me, and swear oath of homage?" demanded Palombris.

Said Flacandrin: "I am not greatly moved to do that. I think we should soon quarrel: for I am not used to a land at peace, ruled by law. But if it will serve thine end, it will likewise serve mine, that I should depart away out of the realm."

Palombris said that he would accept this. Then he set a price of ransom on Flacandrin, and Flacandrin took oath to depart out of the realm within forty days and a day. When they had come to agreement thereon, he continued and said:

"I trust that I shall not be over bold, Constable, if I tell you news that I think will like you." Palombris desired to hear it, so Flacandrin said: "I went into Greenwood, to Isle-Kol, not long ago, for we found a letter of thine that thou didst write three years back, and I sent it on to the place it was meant for."

“Ha,” quoth Palombris; and Flacandrin knew then that he had done wisely to refuse the counsel of the chaplain.

“Fear not,” said Flacandrin. And then he told what he had seen at Isle-Kol. Palombris asked no questions, but listened to all that he said, and when he had done, Palombris waited a space, to see if he had any more to say, but when he said no more, Palombris thanked him, and went into the pavilion. He had his mail stripped off, and lay down on his bed.

He said to himself: “Now I think a chapter is turned in the tale, and I will sleep.” All the weariness and labour of many days fell upon him, and he sank forthwith into a deep slumber.

He slept until night came, when his esquires brought him food and warm wine; and then he slept again, all the night through, while they lay round his tent. And in the morning he still slept, albeit lighter, and all sound was hushed in the camp of the Blue Bull, and the serjeants went on tip toe, for they said to one another that the Constable was sleeping.

Now when Palombris went into the pavilion, Flacandrin wandered away to the place where the prisoners were gathered who had sworn the oath at the Sweet Winds; and a doleful company were they; for well they knew what was about to befall them.

They asked how matters went; and he answered, that as for himself, they went well. They did not seem so pleased at this as they might have been.

He taxed them therewith, and they answered and said, that they had no fellow-feeling for any one who was not about to die.

“It is by no means certain that ye will die,” said Flacandrin. But they answered that surely it would so happen ; and no joy was in them.

So Flacandrin went away, and asked of the men of the Blue Bull, who all replied that without doubt all these prisoners should die when the Constable woke from his sleep.

“How long will he sleep ?” demanded Flacandrin.

“As long as thou dost not look for,” they said.

Flacandrin considered, and returned to the prisoners.

“Hearken,” said he. “The Constable is asleep, and since he has scarce closed his eyes for the best part of a week, I guess he will sleep on for a good while. So set your wits to work, for ye are not dead yet, and much may happen while the Constable is sleeping.”

They answered : “We do not see that this is any comfort to us. What is the good of it ?”

Then Flacandrin said to them : “Hear my counsel. Send for your dames and your daughters, and bring them to petition for your lives.”

They answered : “What use will that be ? It is well known that he regards no woman.”

“Ye will find my counsel deft,” answered Flacandrin, and he left them to debate it.

So at last they resolved to do as he bade ; and he spoke to Giroflanz and the chief men of the Blue Bull, requiring them that they should allow the

prisoners to take farewell of their dames and their daughters ere they came by their deaths. At first they were opposed, saying that it would cause great trouble ; but Flacandrin urged it upon them, and presently they agreed that it would do no such harm as might not be bettered, and they gave permission for it to be done. Then while Palombris drank his warm wine, and went to sleep again, swift riders went forth to seek out all the march castles whereto these knights and lords belonged. And so well they made their journeys, that their errand was well accomplished, albeit some strongholds were too far off to be reached in time.

Then the prisoners said to Flacandrin : “ What shall we bid them say ? ”

“ Whatsoever word ye put into their mouths will be the wrong word,” said he. “ Let them devise for themselves.”

At noon Palombris awoke ; and he had been dreaming somewhat. An esquire came to him, and said : “ Lord, here are many people desiring to speak with you.”

He assented, and rose, and went forth : and there he found well-nigh a hundred dames and demoiselles of all kinds, some of them children, all kneeling in front of his pavilion. He was amazed, and regarded them as one who is thunderstruck.

They said to him : “ Constable, we pray you send not our men to death.”

He started away suddenly, and flung into the tent, and there sat down again in the dark. The esquire still held the flap of the curtain, and smiled

upon all the dames, as one bidding them not lose heart ; and they all turned their eyes to him, but without smile, for they were anxious.

Now Palombris did not wish to let those lords go free, for much he desired it to be known that men should not swear oaths of fealty in Barbizen, and then lightly break them. But while he sat there, he could not remember the faces of any of the women ; when he called them to mind, they all had the face of Pallogris, and it seemed to him as if they were all Pallogris, pleading to God for the life of Palombris. So when he let his mind run thereon, he dared not refuse, lest Pallogris also should be refused.

He went forth again, and said : “ Mesdames, I grant this that you ask of me. No man who can find a woman to ask for him shall suffer death. And if Anguis of Anguiscart also can do that, even he shall not be slain.”

They were right joyful, and thanked him, and went away. So all these lords and knights were saved, excepting only Anguis ; and they sent home to get their ransoms and fines ready. But now they all gave themselves to devising a way by which Anguis might be freed, and they talked this over among themselves.

“ Surely this will be easy enough,” said they, “ and we shall be glad if Anguis may come off without scathe, for it will be a shame to us all if we live, and our leader should die.”

When they had debated for a space, they sent certain of their number to speak with Anguis ; but he received them sourly.

“ This is a jest of the little Constable,” he said.

“ It is a good one in its way. Ye know well enough that I have no dame.”

Now it was widely bruited abroad that he had caused his dame to die by reason of her unhappiness ; so they were a little set back.

Then said one of them : “ We wit well, Anguis, that ye have had to do with a many women. Will not one of these ask for you ? ”

“ Ye are great dullards,” he answered. “ If all your wits were rolled into one, there would yet be more understanding in the Constable’s little finger.”

They were not content therewith, and said again : “ We have never heard tell of a man who could not find some woman to take his part ; for if one will not, another will.”

“ Well, then, find her for me,” quoth Anguis, drily.

So they left him ; but they could not find any woman who would ask for the life of Anguis of Anguiscart ; for some stood off, and were afraid, and there were some who rejoiced openly that he should die.

Thereupon they sent to the Constable, and asked that Anguis should not be doomed yet awhile so that they might send out to seek for a woman to ask for him.

Palombris said : “ Why do ye make this demand of me ? Will not your dames ask on his behalf ? ”

But none of the lords saw his way to bid his own dame do this, lest Anguis look upon her too kindly.

Then they said to Flacandrin : “ Go thou and devise a measure. We can do no more.”

So Flacandrin went out to the edge of the camp ; and he saw an old woman coming towards him.

Marvellously old and ill-favoured was she, and right evil to look at : he thought he had never seen so evil a hag. And when she came near to him, she caused him to tarry, and said to him :

“ I hear that the lord Anguis can find no woman to pray for his life.”

Flacandrin crossed himself, and answered :
“ Even so it is.”

“ I will pray for his life if he will accept me,” quoth she. “ Lead me to him.”

Flacandrin turned back, and led her to Anguis ; and when the lords and knights saw her, they knew not what to think, and some of them said to others :
“ This must be the Devil come for the soul of Anguis.”

And so likewise thought Anguis, for he said :
“ Take her away. I will sooner die than owe my life to her.”

She answered and said : “ Ha, Anguis, ye have never known where right and wrong lay in the matter of women. Ye know not who I am.”

“ Ye are the Devil, I think,” said he, wryly.

“ I may be an angel of light,” she answered, “ if ye could rightly see me.”

“ I shall need to run that risk,” said Anguis.

And all the friends of Anguis were sore afraid, and thought this the evillest of omens for him.

And so it fell out, that there was no woman who would ask for his life, to save it.

Palombris called a court together in the evening, and they adjudged Anguis a forsworn man, and a foe to the realm, and they doomed him to death. And that doom was carried out, for Anguis was

hanged; and there is no more to the story of Anguis of Anguiscart.

This tale went through all the marches as quickly as a bird flies, and was told from mouth to mouth. And it was well believed that no other man in the world would have hanged Anguis, for he was of great blood, and of the most mighty power.

CHAPTER XIV. HOW THEY SETTLED THE NORTHERN MARCHES

THAT summer they ordered and settled all the northern marches, for now the war was utterly stamped down, and no man moved any more. Palombris visited each stronghold and burgh, one after the other, setting things to rights, and seeing that the law and the customs were everywhere observed. He made close enquiry as to the titles by which the lords held their estates, whereas there were diverse who were not able to show clearly how they had come into them. Some of these he put out of their lands, but the more part he accepted, causing them to swear the oaths of homage and fealty.

And all men said that never was a land better ordered than these marches, when Palombris had done with them.

As for the lords, they said to one another: "Well, he is a difficult man to deal with, if we are on the wrong side of him; but there is not so much to grumble at, when all is said. Times are changing, so let us come in with the new day, and be in the way of whatsoever may be of best profit."

So they set themselves to enjoy days of peace,

and albeit they did not come thereto all at once, yet from that time forward the marches waxed in wealth, and fields were enlarged, and there were two ploughs where erstwhile had been but one, and many a peasant grew fat, and had as much wealth as a lord had had in the old days. And men journeyed to and fro, and manners were bettered, and justice done.

When that summer was over, Palombris drew again to the Tower of the Sweet Winds. Aloys came to him there, bearing a letter which the old King had written with his own hand. Palombris went into a window alone, and read it.

“We desire to have thee return to Barbizen, if thou deemest well thereto ; for so nobly hast thou done, that we need thee for greater work than governing a peaceful land, until the realm be all peaceful. Render, therefore, all thy governance into the hands of men whom thou canst trust, and teach them the things thou hast established, and come again to us ; and when thou comest, fear not to ask of us any thing that thine heart desireth, for thou art now the first man in the realm, and there is none other in this land able to do what thou hast accomplished.”

Palombris was glad and sorry over this letter : sorry, because he had grown to make the northern marches his own little realm that he loved, wherein also were many who loved him ; and glad, because now his labour was ended, and he might soon begin the work that should bring Pallogris to him. When he thought of that, he trembled.

He called a great assembly of the chief lords and earls of the marches, at the Tower of the Sweet Winds, ere Michaelmas was come. He spoke to them, and said :

“ I did not come hither to take the rule of the land away from you, for if you cannot rule it, I know not who can. But I came hither to establish peace, and to cast down those who destroyed the realm with their warfaring and disloyalty. So now I wish you to take the rule into your hands again, and to conduct it so that I hear a good report thereof.”

They answered that they would do this.

Then he said : “ I desire you to know well that I shall not forget those who are wise and valiant, and do justly ; for this realm is sorely in need of such men, and when I see them, I shall do all I may to advance them in honour and dignity. Heretofore, the lords of Barbizen have kept to themselves all the chief honour of the realm ; but it shall not be so always. If ye will continue to be my friends, I will in no wise forget you, for I think I have the name of a man who remembers his friends.”

They thought well of this : and one of the earls answered : “ Constable, I think we are of one mind hereon, that we are tired of war and strife, and truly it is no business of ours to help the great lords of Barbizen against thee, whereas they have ever done ill to us, but thou art most whiles just, and intend us good. It will rather be better that we should help thee, and since our own ways have broken down, we will try thy ways, and see what cometh thereof.”

They agreed to do in this manner, and they parted from him peaceably, with friendship.

Palombris added many men to the company of the Blue Bull that Michaelmas, and to many he gave advancement, and rich presents. Every man deemed that to be one of his company was the greatest honour, and the sure path to fame and profit. But he took no man who was enfeoffed, but only younger sons, for he said that those who held of the Blue Bull should gain their wages from the King alone, and should depend wholly upon him.

And after Michaelmas he visited all the lords in the earldom of the Sweet Winds, to thank them and bid them farewell.

Old Pied-à-Feu wept, and embraced him, saying :

“Of a truth, Constable, the sun will go out when thou art departed, and life will lose its savour. Never have days been so good, as while thou hast been with us. Each day we heard of great deeds done, and of great adventures.”

“I shall return again, Pied-à-Feu,” said Palombris.

“If I hear that thou hast trampled on those proud lords of Barbizen, I shall be comforted,” quoth Pied-à-Feu. “And if any one counsels treason in these marches while thou art away, I will go against him in person, even though I am carried in a litter.”

“Old Pied-à-Feu,” said Palombris, “thou art the most worthy and honourable of men, and truly it is a great solace to me that thou art my true friend, and lovest me so well.”

BOOK IV.

VIANE

CHAPTER I. OF THE VERY GLORIOUS RETURN OF THE BLUE BULL TO BARBIZEN

So Palombris led the men of the Blue Bull back to Barbizen ; and when they rode up to the great gate, through which aforetime he and Giroflanz had ridden with a few esquires to seek the northern marches, there was the father of Giroflanz with a very noble company, to meet them.

He bade them welcome, and rode up to Giroflanz and kissed him ; and it was a joy to his heart to look upon his son, who appeared so glorious, and who had achieved such fame. But he said :

“Tell me, Constable, in what wise you return to us ; for if there should be any who need intercession, and peace-making on their behalf, I am here for that end.”

“I return with the land at peace,” answered Palombris ; “and if there be any in Barbizen who are guilty of evil doing, or of treason, I know not their names, nor hath any man demanded justice against them.”

He was at ease when he heard that, for many a man in Barbizen quaked, witting well that his name was not hidden from the Constable. So he turned his horse about, and rode back to spread this good news. And after a little while, the Blue Bull passed the gates, and began their entry into the burgh.

Palombris entered Barbizen as though he were a conqueror. All the streets were hung with cloths of silk and gold, and with garlands; and he rode through them all in his array of war, and those who had never seen him, or had never noted him, now saw that he was a young man scarcely past boyhood. But now they all said: "He is Kol's son, and that counts for something." But it was Palombris himself who counted for most.

And there were many fair women who saw him; and because he had grown greater they were now more vexed with him than ever. But Palombris had grown in all things save in stature; alike in strength, and in skill and force, and in love of Pallogris; for now he had found his own place, and the deeds he was born to do.

They lodged in a great hostelry that lay across the way from the King's palace: and after they had heard mass in the minster, Palombris chose out certain men to stay with him, and the rest he dismissed to an encampment without the burgh. That hostel came to be called the Constable's Hostel. Two hundred knights and esquires dwelt there, and it was the mightiest household in Barbizen, for all who were of it were strictly ruled, and obeyed Palombris in all things; and that was a great marvel to all who looked upon it.

When Palombris had arrayed himself, he sought out the King. Almost had the King looked for the return of a man wholly unlike the former man; but when Palombris came near, it was the old Palombris, no whit changed, save for a deeper colour in

his cheeks, and a greater breadth of body. The old King was rejoiced, and scarce could speak ; but he held forth his hands, and embraced Palombris tenderly.

“ Dear lad,” he said, “ ye make me wondrous happy.”

He kissed Palombris, who answered : “ Dear sir, I am always glad when I make any one happy. I trust it is not a weakness. But thee most of all men I rejoice to make happy.”

Forthwith they began to talk as though they had been parted but a day or two ; and Palombris told all that he had done, and listened to all that the King told him. And the marvel grew on the old King, and he rose up from his chair, and began to wander about the room, saying : “ Can it be that thou art the terrible little Constable, or have I been deceived ? ”

Palombris answered : “ O, it is always so. If we could see the mighty men of old, I think they would be as simple as we are. For they differed in no wise from others, that eye could see. And now I am a mighty man ; but what was not luck therein was simplicity and patience. I trust to be no worse than heretofore.”

“ I begin to think that thou art right,” quoth the King. Then he bade Palombris sit at his feet, as he had used to do ; and Palombris fetched a stool, and curled himself up thereon, and the King stroked his cheek with a finger as they conversed ; and they opened their hearts to one another, and talked long.

The King told him all that had befallen in Bar-

bizen : and Palombris answered : “ Ye have run a great risk, dear sir ; but ye shall never run such risk again. There are many men now in Barbizen who have done treason. We will turn a blind eye upon them, and let them understand that those days are over. Ever henceforth ye shall rule this realm safely, and have about you men obedient and of good heart.”

Few men then had such fame as had Palombris and Giroflanz ; yet most men deemed, without many words spoken, that Giroflanz was but an eager and valiant knight. They knew him too well from his childhood to look to him for the wisdom and power to devise great deeds. So the King praised Giroflanz smiling, and all the lords praised Giroflanz, and gave him great honour for what he had done ; and some thought of their daughters who were of his age, and the daughters also cast eyes upon Giroflanz, and thought him the flower of knighthood.

But the day after he entered Barbizen, Palombris had masons to his hostel ; and they made strange marks upon the walls with chalk, to the wonderment of all onlookers. And shortly after, they began to build a flying bridge from the Constable's hostel, across the street into the King's palace, so that at any hour he might walk across to the King's apartments. Then the lords began to say to one another in secret : “ We must regard ourselves ; for the Constable is on the way to become the King.”

Yet nought there was changed, in the ways

wherein things were done ; only the lords perceived that their counsel no longer counted as much as of old, but the counsel of Palombris out-weighed them all. None the less, he pressed nothing upon the King, but in all ways counselled him sweetly, and well, and the King leaned upon him. So matters grew with Palombris.

One day John of the Marches and the King paced arm in arm through the green pleasaunce with its flowery closes, where the blackbirds ran on the lawns, and the roses grew.

"Of old," said John, "I prayed to God to give me such a son as Palombris."

"But that was given to Kol, not to thee," quoth the King.

"And thou also art childless," said John.

The old King was silent awhile, until he said :

"There are a few men left in Barbizen, whom I deem like to the men I knew long ago, before the days of weakness came. Thou art one, and Palombris is another ; men of courtesie and valiance, fit to do great deeds."

"So few ?" quoth John.

"Dost thou fear on that count ?" said the King.

"I would whisper in thine ear," quoth John.

The King answered : "There is no man in whom I put more faith than in thee."

"I am ever a loyal servant," said John.

"I believe thee well, John," quoth the King.

So John said : "My King, I may err, yet I think

that although the men of courtesie have been few and weak, yet now is arisen one of subtlety and kinghood. I would wager mine head that the boy of firm heart and unkissed lips will prove grimmer and swifter than all the ganders of Barbizen."

"And why?" asked the King, regarding him steadily.

"My dear lord," quoth John, "many things are hard to tell of: I cannot speak too many clear words. Remember Kol: remember the men thou knewest once on a time. And thou: if evil men laid hands on thee, what wouldst thou do?"

"Wouldst thou help me, John?" quoth the King.

"Right speedily," said John, "but yet thou wouldst need to ask here and to pray there. But Palombris would clap his hands."

"And what then?" demanded the King, curiously, not wholly understanding this.

"The BLUE BULL," quoth John. Then he said again: "Yea, a strange thing it is, how there ariseth one man now and again, whose look and touch are magic. What he will do, who may say? Yet flowers are under his feet, and men worship him."

"Kol was such a man," said the King.

"And such a man is Palombris," answered John. "Give him five years more, my King, and die not till then."

"Do not his foes declare this?" said the King.

"They are right withal," quoth John; "for he will restore thy kinghood, and be more faithful even

than I ; his counsel unto thee will be subtle and wiser than mine ; none among us will be so true to thee ; for in the house he builds for thee he himself will one day dwell. And this he may not avoid or put aside, whereas things shape to that end."

So the old King thought over this and said : " It is what I have hoped for. He shall go to the western marches, and settle them ; and then, John, if he prosper, he shall take thy rule, and we shall see. Wilt thou that ? "

" Right willingly," quoth John. So they devised many things cunningly, and John said : " While we devise these things for him, let us wonder how much he knoweth thereof, and what he maketh ready for us."

" Lieth the wind there ? " said the King.

John answered : " No woman ever kissed him."

The King pondered : for to him also this seemed to mean much : yet he knew not quite what.

But while they spoke thus, Palombris sat in a little room overlooking fair gardens, before a window that had a view over the golden burgh as it slept in the sun ; and the blue land that faded into hills where vines grew, and sheep walks went above. He wrote with a pen, and wrote such words as these to Pallogris :

" My playmate, never for one hour have I forgotten thee, nor desired any thing more than to behold thee : unless it were that I desired more that thou shouldst love me as I love thee. So well I prosper, that soon I shall seek Greenwood and ask

thee to come hither, that we may never be parted again. I know not what thou art growing into, but I am the same now as ever I was, and I pray only for one thing, that thou mayst love me as well as heretofore, and never less."

He wrote many more things besides this, and last of all he said : " I have bidden him who carries this letter to take from thee a yea or a nay,—and that is, whether thou wilt come with me when I may take thee. Remember to give him a true answer."

So he sealed this letter with his own signet ring, that bore Kol's badge upon it : and it was a man of the Blue Bull who rode with it to Greenwood, a long journey.

When Pallogris had this letter, her heart trembled : for she knew not what she had grown into, save that she loved him now more than before. Yet he had not seen her for many seasons, and who might tell what would spring of that, when they met once more ?

She said to the rider : " Who art thou ? "

" I am an esquire of the Blue Bull," he answered.

She said : " I know not surely what that is."

He told her : and she trembled again, and laid the letter down on a bank of grass. And the esquire was not loth to speak of Palombris : he told her of his guise, and his strength, and his boy's face, and the valour and craft he had, and the company of the Blue Bull ; and he told her of Anguis, and of the siege of Anguiscart, and the battle against the march host, and all that came thereof, more than has been written in this tale. And he told her that

Palombris was the most powerful man in Barbizen, and able to set up and to cast down.

She kept that esquire as long as she might, asking him all she dared to ask. And in the end she said :

“ Was not an answer to be borne back ? ”

“ Oh, yea,” said he ; “ and I cannot go lacking it.”

She answered : “ It is yea.” And yet she dreaded what might come of that answer, albeit none other could she have given, though the heavens fell. But when that esquire had gone, she fell to dreaming as she had dreamed before, and was happy in dreaming, but all around her happiness lay a great fear

CHAPTER II. OF VIANE THE PROUD, THE SISTER OF GIROFLANZ

Now Palombris dwelt in Barbizen, leisurely enough in some ways, yet ever engaged in his businesses. He saw to it that his settlement of the northern marches should be ratified without error or treachery ; and now it stood him in good stead that he could read, and understood the speech of the law, and what the law was : and after a little while the clerics of the chancellery wist well that the little Constable knew too much to be hoodwinked.

So all offices were confirmed, and all grants of estate were made good in law, and there was much searching out of pedigrees and armoury, so that the right men might be established without mistake ;

and those of the march lords who found it hard to say whence they got their titles, also found it hard to say who were their grandfathers, for they were not enrolled on the rolls of the kings of arms, but now they were enrolled by the Constable's commandment. Thus in all ways Palombris ruled the marches of the north well-nigh as though he were the King, for he did all the things that the King would have done, had he been another kind of man.

But while this was doing, he made ready to go westward the next spring, for there the marches were still somewhat unsettled. So he gathered provision, and stuffed castles with goods, and made ready in such wise that the war should be swift and short. And he let it be well known that he had this intention, so that men might have good space to think over the matter, and to consider how they stood.

Between these things he found time for sport. Every morning when it was fine and fair, he rode forth of the burgh with his company, with hawk on wrist and hound on leash. But if it were wet, he would pace to and fro in the cloister that ran round the court of his hostel, while a cleric read aloud out of a book. He had the wars of the Romans written in a book, and the wars of King Alexander in another, and they all listened very gladly to the reading of these books. And sometimes the gentlemen of the Blue Bull called him Alexander, and themselves the men of Macedon.

Viane, the sister of Giroflanz, heard of this, and prayed earnestly that she might hear the tale of

King Alexander ; so he made intercession for her, and it was granted that she should sit by the cleric, and listen. This she did whensoever the book was opened ; she sat in a chair, and Palombris and five or six gentlemen paced to and fro, arm in arm, as was their custom, while others stood about, or rested on seats. And at last her mind mixed them all up strangely, Alexander, and Candace, and the trees of the Sun and the Moon, and the Constable's garden, and the men of the Blue Bull,—and there grew in her a passion of delight over these things.

The sister of Giroflanz had great honour from the Blue Bull ; and also, her beauty charmed them, and many a rough-handed rider of the marches looked upon her with pleasure. And it gave her great happiness to be revered by them, and to disdain them ; but one thing she lacked, for as yet the Constable himself she could not charm nor disdain.

Palombris hated all that confused or dimmed the image of Pallogris in his mind, so he looked but little on women, and most whiles turned away from them if he might. He deemed Viane shallow-headed, and of no great heart ; but herein he was afterwards proved to be wrong. He judged her by Giroflanz ; and in some ways they were alike, yet in many ways unlike. They were alike in this, that they were both of them exceeding proud and haughty of demeanour, and Viane was fair, even as Giroflanz was. Often it falleth out that some families breed men, while others breed women ; and so it was with the house of Giroflanz, that it bred women, for even the men

were like women, and the women exceeded all others in beauty and womanhood. And whereas Giroflanz was languid by nature, and little given to thinking for himself, Viane was of a right hardy heart, and quick to set her will upon whatsoever she desired, and to win it.

Now Viane set her heart upon speaking to the Constable, and in the end she brought it about, for she was proud enough to have no care whether she took the high hand or the lowly. One day she called him to her, and he had no choice in courtesy but to go.

"Constable," she said, "dost thou account it a true tale concerning the trees of the Sun and the Moon?"

"I have heard tales as strange," he answered.

"Then thou accountest it true?" she asked.

"One should not be too quick to believe a tale true or false," said Palombris, "for often the judgment is far astray. There are few things we can be assured of."

She liked this well, for she saw that he was not given to ready speech, but that he pondered matters over, and weighed his words. But after this day, it grew easier to speak to him: albeit, it was never wholly easy, for he distrusted her.

On a day she said to him: "Tell me, Constable, if thou deemest Alexander swift or slow of mind, that he should have been so great a King."

"A man needs to be somewhat slow," said he, "if he is to be swift at need; for he who has made up his mind beforehand will have none to make up when the press comes upon him."

"Now I know all that I wished to know," said she.

He tarried, and regarded her.

"In what way?" he asked.

"I thought it a strange tale," answered Viane, "that ye of the Blue Bull brought to pass in the marches, and deemed it all chance hap and bare luck; and I despised the lords of Barbizen that they had been cast down by boys."

"Giroflanz cometh of a good stock," said he.

"I sat in a window," said Viane, "and watched the array of the Blue Bull as ye rode through the streets; and when I saw you riding, many things lost their savour to me, for I knew well that a greater mind than that of Giroflanz lay behind the deeds ye did."

He laughed a little, and made to depart, seeing whither she was leading; but when she perceived his intent, she broke swiftly into speech again, and he could not leave her without discourtesy.

"I marvelled at the change in Giroflanz," she said, "for he was much bettered and bore himself most nobly, and seemed used to the company of great and powerful men. But after I had talked with him, I perceived that the change was in the outer rather than in the inner man; withal, we all wondered at it, and deemed him mightily waxed in spirit."

"Giroflanz is the flower of knighthood," answered Palombris.

"So they all say," quoth Viane, "and we were happy thereat. None the less, I wished to look

somewhat deeper into the matter, feeling assured that he had not grown thus all of himself. But I see now, Constable, who it was that wrought these works."

"Ye do me over much honour," said he. "I am no more able to make bricks without straw than are other men."

"I do not think," answered Viane, "that any one has done thee more honour than thou deservest; and it may well prove, in the end, that they would have given thee more, had they better understood the truth of thy deeds. Thou hidest thyself under a bushel, Constable."

"It does not seem so to me," he said. "I have neither hidden myself nor displayed myself, but I have done that which was on my road, and I trust that I have done it well. Moreover, it pleaseth me not much to talk thereof, for my joy in what I did will lose its savour if many words are spent on it."

Viane answered: "Truly, thou art a modest man; for had I done thy deeds, I should have gloried exceedingly in them. Hast thou no ambition?"

"I will not say that," he said. Then he smiled somewhat, like the sun coming from behind a cloud. "Be not too sure of knowing the desires of any man," said he, "for a man with a keen desire is silent concerning it."

"How is it," she asked, "that thy thoughts on all matters differ so widely from those of other men? All thou sayest is strange and wise."

"They do not differ so much as ye think," he said.

“That which I say, is the common wisdom of all those who prosper and do goodly deeds. Ye have hitherto heard but the fruitless wisdom of men whose works have failed, because they wrought foolishly.”

Viane trembled in her heart to hear him say this.

“Why dost thou speak of goodly deeds?” she demanded.

He answered: “It is certain that those who bring justice amongst men, and rule wisely, and nourish their realm into fatness, build on a rock; but they who seek only their own ends wreck both themselves and others. Ye shall find it prove so.”

“Was it not weak to spare thine enemies as thou didst?” said she.

“Nay,” he answered. “Therein I did well.”

Said Viane: “Why didst thou not slay them all, and put thy friends into their estates? Then thou wouldst have been all-powerful, and if it were in thy mind to do good to all men, thou couldst then have done it.”

He answered: “Thou art so eager to slay them all, that thou hast not considered the upshot. A grateful foe is far better than a proud friend.”

She knew what he meant, and it pleased her that he should be so shrewd of counsel, for it ran with her own wishes.

She said to him: “What is the secret of power?”

“That has not been found out yet,” answered Palombris. “I know no more than ye do.”

“How can a man become powerful, and not know the secret of power?” asked Viane. “If he

travels on a road, certainly he knows the winding of the road."

"But not who built it, nor why it was built," said he. "Albeit he may have suspicions. Ask him who laid the road; he may know."

"And who was that?" she asked.

But he only smiled and did not answer. And while she puzzled over it, he departed.

His words were to her as rain upon a parched land. Greatly she desired to ask him more, for whatsoever he said caused thoughts to spring in her mind as flowers by the way-side, and whereas she had often striven to understand how realms were ruled, and how some men became great and powerful, never had she been able to encompass it. But to speak with him was to be in fresh open country.

But he avoided her; and Viane was angry because of his coldness; and she set her heart upon it, that she would subdue the Constable even as he had subdued the marches, if it might be brought to pass.

Then Giroflanz said to Palombris: "Art thou so deep in devices and contrivances, Constable?"

"By no means," quoth Palombris, easily.

"Well," said Giroflanz, "have I not been a worthy follower unto thee? I pray thee, then, do me this honour, that thou wilt come to my father's house, for all houses are open to thee at thy will, and surely thou shalt receive great honour there."

Palombris assented; yet he was not assured in his mind concerning who had stirred in the matter.

None the less, the father of Giroflanz was a mighty man, and had been a great stay to him ; wherefore Palombris was the more bound to be at his disposal. He paid his attention to the old lord, who regarded him with friendly eye, and liked him well. And when he saw that Viane looked upon the Constable with some closeness, it crossed his mind that the match would be a worthy one on all grounds. So at that house Palombris was greatly honoured.

Viane said to Giroflanz : “ How is it that no one knows the thoughts of the Constable ? ”

“ Truly,” he answered, “ how could he be the little Constable if he wore his mind on his sleeve ? ”

“ Dost thou think his power lieth therein ? ” said she.

“ In what else could it lie ? ” demanded Giroflanz.

Viane deemed Giroflanz a fool, and once on a time she would straightway have said so ; but now she held her peace.

There were joyances and festivities in Barbizen. and it so came to pass, that most whiles Palombris found himself matched with Viane ; and men noted this, and spoke of it in all manner of ways.

Some said : “ The Constable has a shrewd eye for whatsoever is of advantage. It will be a good match.”

But others answered : “ It will be she who has stirred most herein.”

And many were jealous, and spoke bitterly, one way or the other ; but this remained, that which way soever they spoke, still did they speak of Viane

and Palombris together, and their words came round again to her kinsfolk, who were well disposed towards the matter, and made way for Viane, that her cause should be furthered.

Palombris found that these things were harder to deal with than the lords of the marches.

Andreas, the banner-bearer of the Blue Bull, spoke to him, and told him what was said.

"It is of nought," answered Palombris.

"Then thy mind does not drift that way?" said Andreas.

"Be assured," said Palombris, "that it is none of my doing; so thou wilt be well counselled to look for another ending to the tale."

Andreas saw trouble ahead.

Palombris thought that he would cast about to find a manor or castle without the burgh, whither he might retire at whiles; but this was not easy to bring about as then, for he needed to be much with the King. So he tarried somewhat in the camp of the Blue Bull; and it was noted that the Constable was less in his hostel than heretofore.

There was a serving woman of Viane who repeated this saying to her.

Viane answered: "No doubt the Constable is minded to make attack on the burgh, wherein are many of his foes, as we all know."

The serving woman told this again, and it spread about wondrous fast, and presently messengers came hurrying to Palombris, asking if it were true, for it was commonly reported in the burgh that he had intent to destroy all his foes therein.

He answered : " Some folk are marvellously quick to fit caps on their own head."

But he adjudged it wise to return to his hostel, and thus he did. It was long or ever that report died down, and Palombris was not sure who had stirred most in spreading it. Yet he thought that it is harder to outwit a woman than to overcome a man.

CHAPTER III. OF THE CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT OF THE WESTERN MARCHES

Now in the spring following, Palombris received the rule of the western marches ; and he and Giroflanz went thither, not now poor and few, but with all the company of the Blue Bull, and the treasure they had gathered. But soon after they had come into the marches, Palombris fell sick, and for long could not go forth ; and this was a great irk to him, who was little used to sickness. Giroflanz stood in his stead, and went by his wisdom : for Palombris had prepared all things so well, that for him it was like a game of chess that is played blindfold, and he bade Giroflanz do this and that, and the Blue Bull did the rest, until by midsummer all the wars were stamped down, and many lords and knights were sent to Barbizen, and the land was settled, and the marches pushed to their ancient limit.

So the renown of the Blue Bull waxed greater still ; but many of those in Barbizen began to say that Giroflanz was plainly the force of that company, and the great man thereof ; for he had done

without the help of the Constable, and brought all things to a good issue. Which Giroflanz was pleased to believe too, and it increased his pride. Thus the western marches were re-established, and peace grew there as it had never erstwhile in the memory of man, and the realm flourished and grew rich.

And when this had been brought to pass, Palombris recovered his strength, and was whole again.

He tarried there until Michaelmas, settling the land, and it was then that he had a marvellous great pleasure ; for Pallogris sent him back a letter written with her own hand. It was a short letter, and in it she said that she knew not whether he would love her as much after he had seen her again, and she desired him to see her ere he built up hopes. He pored over that letter until he knew it by heart ; and he delighted in each word of it, noting how finely it was written, far better than he himself could encompass. As for what she said, it made him most happy, for he set no store whatsoever by her fears, yet had great pleasure that she should care so much for him as to feel them.

But after Michaelmas he must needs return to Barbizen ; and his power was increased. All men, and women too, paid court to him ; yet he knew well that it was but skin-deep love that they had, and he accounted it as a small thing. And when he returned, he found that he might in no wise escape Viane. That was an impatient winter-tide for him. He was less happy than ever before ; a chance which oftentimes happens when men are on the verge of their chief desire.

That winter the King left Barbizen, and dwelt in one of his country manors ; all the chief men of the court followed him, so they were all brought close together, and they made much festivity to pass away the time. And all men observed that Viane and Palombris were much together.

Giroflanz was friendly, for Viane had persuaded him that Palombris was not free from jealousy at that year's deeds and was a little saddened thereat ; the which pleased Giroflanz. Moreover, Viane caused him to think that Palombris languished a little for love, but feared, being but timid with women. Then Giroflanz started this hare with the rest of his house, and all the kinsfolk believed what Giroflanz reported of Palombris, and they were pleased ; so they all fell to plot and plan to give him room, and to bring Viane and him together.

So subtly was this encompassed, that none saw the hand of Viane in the matter ; but Palombris saw it, and divined what he could not see, and Viane knew not that he saw it. Palombris smiled, and stored in memory all that he perceived, and he walked prudently ; but the end of it was no more than this, that they laughed a little at him secretly, for that he was so timid a man with women.

It was not hidden from the old King that Palombris and Viane were spoken of. On a day he called John of the Marches to him, and questioned him. John said that he knew no more than was commonly reported.

“ Dost thou deem it true ? ” demanded the King.

“ I know not,” quoth John.

The King said : " I should have thought that thou wouldst have had early news of the truth."

" Messire," answered John, " I might well have said the same to thee."

The King said again : " How is it that we shrink from making question ? "

" I will ask him, if I am bidden," said John.

" Nay," answered the King, " I will bid nothing."

So they were both silent.

Then John said : " It may be that we shrink from questioning, lest we find the answer against our wishes."

" I see nothing in it that need displease us," answered the King. " Tell me what manner of woman she is."

John answered : " A most haughty woman, who despiseth most men, deeming them of little worth, and in no wise fit mates for her. And I think that for this reason most of all she despiseth them, that they all praise her and seek after her, and think no woman her equal. And of a truth, I do not know of any woman that is."

" Such a woman," said the King, " might well be the mate of the little Constable, for he is much given to the conquest of difficult things, and to deeds wherein other men fail."

Said John : " But if he could conquer Viane the Proud, it would be the greatest of his conquests. There is this also to bear in mind, that unless I am mistaken, she is exceedingly ambitious, and may well have cast her eyes upon a man who is as far beyond other men as she is beyond other women."

The King said : “ I am minded to look into this matter for myself.”

So he bade Giroflanz bring his sister to him ; and he talked often with Viane, and observed her closely, and watched how Palombris bore himself towards her. Then it seemed to him that Palombris must be laying a long net around Viane, and enticing her into it ; and he was pleased at himself for finding out so much. And the graciousness of the King towards Viane made matters much worse, for it caused all folk to be sure that the common report was true.

But then they all said : “ Why does he not speak thereof ? ”

When Christmas was past and over, Palombris returned to Barbizen, and set about preparing for the war that should come in the spring-time. Andreas spoke to him soon after he came, and said :

“ Constable, let me speak.”

“ At thine own will,” answered Palombris.

Then said Andreas : “ The Blue Bull demandeth of me the truth of the report that thou art to wed Viane. I have told them that it is false ; but yet they are not content, and I press me to ask thee afresh.”

“ I have no such intent,” said Palombris.

Said Andreas : “ All men declare it, Constable.”

“ Then deny it to all men,” answered Palombris.

“ Am I verily to do that ? ” demanded Andreas.

“ If so, I will nail up a bill in the camp.”

“Leave it alone,” said Palombris, half smiling and half frowning.

On a day, Palombris sought out Andreas, but could not find him ; and he went through the camp of the Blue Bull until he came to a great pavilion, and entered into it, seeking Andreas. There were serjeants posted all about that pavilion, and they looked upon Palombris, he knew not why, but they said nought.

But when he entered the pavilion, there was a great gathering assembled, of all the chief men of the Blue Bull, the marshal, and constables, and the banner-bearer, and many others.

Palombris regarded them, and they looked in such wise that he regarded them afresh, for they looked marvellously guilty.

Then rose up the marshal, and said :

“Constable, ye have come upon us unawares ; but since it is so, tarry a while and listen to what we are saying.”

Palombris drew in, and hearkened.

“Messire,” said the marshal, “we feel left somewhat alone, and as if we had none to guide us. We have met together to settle what we shall do if the foes of our companionship should get the upper hand, and we be in danger of being rent in twain. We have agreed that we will not consent to the counsels of our foes, but that we will resist them, and remain one unbroken company as hitherto we have ever been.”

“Ha,” quoth Palombris, “what is this ?”

“Know ye not, messire,” said the marshal, “that

evil people are desiring to create dissension amongst us, that they may destroy our power and cast us down ? ”

“ Why was not this reported to me ? ” asked Palombris. He came, and they made room for him, and he sat down in a chair, and they moved so that they made as it were a court, with him presiding therein.

“ Speak more plainly in this matter,” he said.

“ Have I thy full license and permission, Constable ? ” demanded the marshal.

“ Assuredly,” answered Palombris.

The marshal went on and said : “ There is one amongst us whom I do not name as yet, but on whom lieth the chief blame. This is the way of it ; there is a certain woman who has set herself to win and wed that man, so that she may thereby gain the power that her heart longs for, whereas he is a very powerful man, and in all ways worth a woman’s love. Now, it standeth thus with him : he avows that he will not wed her, and we must needs believe him ; yet he does nothing to stop the speech of people, so that if he weddeth her not, all will surely hold that he has done her wrong, and cast slur upon her,—and this her kinsfolk will believe, who are very many, and strong, and have hitherto been our friends. So if he weddeth her not, as he says, presently we look for it that she will fix a quarrel upon him, and in that strife some of us will not know whither to turn ; and we are discontent, and have none to guide us nor counsel us. Hence we

have gathered together in this place to talk it over. Have I spoken well, messires ? ”

They assented ; and then they turned their eyes upon Palombris, who had become red as fire.

“ Ye are a bold man, marshal,” said he, “ to trench so near the root of the matter.”

“ We are all of us bold men, who carry the Blue Bull,” quoth the marshal. “ Let him wear the cap whom it fits. Now, I ask all worthy and honourable men of our company, to whom we shall cleave when the quarrel breaks forth. For if we do not choose until the day comes, we shall be torn asunder with doubt. Thee first I call upon, Constable.” And therewith he sat down.

Palombris rose up, and said : “ I counsel that ye cleave to the King, whose servants ye are ; for ye are neither my servants, nor the servants of any man save him only. This ye shall fix firmly in your hearts before all else. Thus much I will say in answer to you, marshal ; that ye be not over-quick nor hasty, for ye know not how deep things run. I have hitherto led you to your good contentment. Do not think that I am become different. I will myself lead the way in truth and faith towards our common lord : wherefore have patience, and be ready against whatsoever may come.”

“ Messire,” quoth the marshal, “ we are all ready to follow your bidding with a whole heart, so long as we know you to be wakeful.”

“ Then are we all satisfied,” answered Palombris. “ Let this meeting now be broken up.”

They said no more, nor did he. But when he left

the pavilion he was still very red, and none of them challenged him in any way.

CHAPTER IV. OF THE CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT OF THE SOUTHERN MARCHES

IN the spring, Palombris and Giroflanz set forth afresh, and they came to the southern marches, and dwelt in a tower not far from the March Tower, in all that sweet land which Palombris knew so well. And though Flacandrin dwelt no longer in the Wood Debateable, there were yet Companions there, and behind it were the great mountains, and beyond that, the river, and over the river was Greenwood.

He looked over the land from a gallery of his tower, one evening soon after he came, and thought these thoughts, and looked at the sun setting behind bars of crimson, and amid a glow of gold, and he said to himself: "By the grace of God, I shall set my foot upon these marches too, and even reach Greenwood." He thought over this and was glad of heart, and he longed so deeply for the days to come that it was a pain to him, and he could have wept.

Then Giroflanz fell sick, and the war fell this time to Palombris, who was right glad to have it so. And he cast his net about the Wood Debateable, and by force and by craft he enmeshed the Companions, so that men spoke for long and long after of the clearing of the woods, for here, as elsewhere, men never forgot the deeds of Kol's son, but made songs

thereof, and remembered him as the great duke of the marches.

He forced the passes of the mountains, and built a strong tower where the Dragon Haunt in the Hills had been; he let it be called by that name, Dragon Haunt, and he set peace in the land, and pushed on to the river.

So one day in late summer the poor folk saw men with the Blue Bull on their breasts come to the ferry, and much they marvelled at this new thing. Then said one to them: "Did not a boy with an iron buckle in his cap pass here once, a few years ago?"

They answered: "Messire, we remember, for so few pass here that we forget none."

"He made a promise to you," said the knight, "that if he could do you good, that same good should be done you. Be of good cheer, therefore, for he is come again, and the days of strife and danger are about to cease."

And it came about as Palombris said, for he made conquest of all the river, up to the Flowery Garth where he had been born, and whence he had been taken away by Kol on that evil night; and from that day forth an earl reigned in the Dragon Haunt, and dealt out justice, and ruled the land.

Palombris rode a day's journey into Greenwood, until he might go no further. The summer wore late, and when he was assured that he could not as then visit Isle-Kol, he turned back; but he thought that all this labour in a land familiar, yet grown strange, brought him nearer Pallogris and glad things. And it renewed his heart, and woke afresh

many thoughts and pleasures that had grown dimmed.

So when he turned back, he said to his knights :

“Messires, here endeth part of a tale, for there are no more long labours for the Blue Bull. What more we shall do, I know not ; perchance we have yet battles before us ; but now the marches are all conquered, and all evil men are thrust forth.”

Now is the tale all told of the conquest of the marches : for when the leaves were falling from the trees, Palombris rode back to Barbizen, the greatest lord in the realm ; and the streets were hung with silk and cloth of gold, and flowers were under the hoofs of his destrier, and all men rejoiced. Yet after all these things he remained still the same, neither proud nor pleasure-loving, and he arrayed himself no otherwise than simply. Yet also, he was changed now, for he cast away all the days of strife and labour, and looked for no thing but that for which he had wished so long. And the wiser feared him for this, that in all matters he was gracious and simple and debonnair, yet none knew his thoughts, nor what it was that he intended.

CHAPTER V. HERE IS TOLD OF A CHAPLET

WHEN the men of the Blue Bull came back from the marches that autumn, they entered Barbizen in state, the mightiest battle of war-worn men that ever was seen in the land. Before them went three heralds of arms, clad in white, with the Bull on their

breasts, blowing great trumpets two yards long, with flourish and strophe. And behind them they left a realm all at peace, and taken to its uttermost limits, where men were again beginning to plough, and sow, and build up their houses, and earls sat in judgment, and gave faithful justice.

Before the banners rode Palombris on the right hand, and Giroflanz on the left. Palombris wore blue, and his mail of proof was inlayed with blue over its darkness ; but Giroflanz wore white, and his mail was inlayed with silver. And so they rode on their tall destriers, and behind them came a forest of spears, and a garden of blazonry. There were five thousand knights and esquires and pages ; and all the streets were hung as for a feast day, and all the windows were thronged with folk. They cast flowers down upon them, and there was not a man but deemed them the very glory of the realm, and not a woman but looked upon them with wonder and hope ; and every maid would sooner have had a lover amongst them, than amongst any other men in Barbizen.

Then as they turned into the great market place, where the minster rose before them, first its multitude of steps, then its vast arched porches, and its soaring fire-like pinnacles that went up into the blue heavens, they passed the house where dwelt the father of Giroflanz, who that day had all his friends there on a balcony to see. Among the folk there was Viane, seen of all, for she stood alone on a balcony. And in truth there was none like her, and many of the commons gathered under the balcony

to stare at her, and to marvel, as if she were scarce of human flesh, but rather an angel ; for her skin was like to alabaster, save where it flushed into pale rose, and there was light in her eyes, and life in her lips, and her coiled hair glittered like bronze. And she was nobly built, as a queen might be.

Then as Palombris and Giroflanz passed, she threw a chaplet of roses down upon them, but whether by chance or intent, she cast it awry, so that Giroflanz must miss it. He saw this, but none the more might he catch the chaplet, and it would have been trampled beneath the hoofs of the horses had not Palombris seen it too. He pulled his horse round suddenly, and rose in his stirrups, and lifted his long spear, and caught the garland with the tip thereof, and let it slide down the shaft to his hand : and he smiled up and bowed, and that smile turned Viane's blood to fire, and her heart to sunshine. And there were few but laughed and applauded, and Viane was seen of all eyes, and loved that well ; and her father smiled contentedly, and all his friends saw that he was not displeased.

Then they were at the minster, and Palombris dismounted ; but when he gave over his spear into the hands of his page, the page slipped off the chaplet and rendered it back to him, and he did not note this, but went up the steps carrying the chaplet in one hand and his Constable's sword in the other. The King met him, and Palombris bent his knee, saying : " Sir, receive again this sword at your pleasure, for I have accomplished all that you bade me."

The King answered : “ Messire, we pray you to retain and keep it. Receive from us this collar.” And upon the neck of Palombris he set the jewelled collar of an earl.

They stood for a moment ere they entered the minster, and there was that confusion which happens when many people prepare themselves in order. The King said : “ But for what is this garland thou givest me, Palombris ? ”

“ Pardon,” quoth Palombris, awakening and colouring ; “ I had forgotten. Viane threw it, and I caught it.”

And therewith he knew that he had been entrapped by events and his own ardour.

“ I will not rob thee of it,” quoth the King, smiling ; but he wondered a little, and others around him also wondered, and Giroflanz heard all. Then they began to enter the minster, preceded by long rows of white-clad choristers and canons, and a bishop with a mitre.

But a little while after, Palombris stood beside Viane a little moment, while the gaily clad folk in the great hall of the palace moved about them, and the music beat in the gallery. She was fair and fresh and smiling.

“ Messire,” she said, “ thou hast somewhat of mine that I gave thee not.”

“ What is that ? ” asked he. “ For I have forgotten.”

She said : “ The chaplet.”

“ True,” quoth Palombris. “ Wilt thou that I return it ? ”

"Art thou ready to part with it?" she questioned. So he said: "Demoiselle, that is for thee to say."

"Well," quoth Viane, "I will that thou return it to me."

So one day he took the garland in his hand, when he went with Giroflanz; and he said: "I have this to give Viane, since she wills it."

"It is the garland," said Giroflanz, smiling. "Art thou so unready to keep it, then?"

Palombris said nought, since to say any thing was hard; but Giroflanz was not displeased with his own thoughts, only he was sharp-eyed and jealous for Viane and himself. He was proud, and Palombris knew that things might go hard, between one thing and the other.

Then Giroflanz, who thought himself subtle, drew aside those few who were in the garden, and he found Viane, and spoke to her, and told her that Palombris had something to render to her. She departed forthwith, and entered the garden, and there saw him walking slowly; his back was turned to her, and he was studying the last over-blown roses of the year, that were scattering their petals over the brown earth and the green grass. She tarried there, watching him, with her hand on the lattice, until he roused himself, and began to walk back; and then she passed through a little gate, and they both walked slowly, until they met. And withal, Viane's heart beat hard, for this was the first time she had encountered him alone.

"Thou art a very faithful debtor," she said.

"It is not more difficult than to be unfaithful,"

he answered. "It is as easy for a bird to fly as for a fish to swim."

"An eagle flies strongly," said Viane. "Wilt thou then give me the garland?"

"Behold it," he said, smiling; so he rendered it to her, and she held it in her hand, scarce knowing surely whether it came too fast for her perfect pleasure, or whether this were an earnest of things to come.

"Alas, it is withered and dead now," quoth she. "All the bloom and scent are gone."

"Well, I have been the richer for them," he answered, "so the loss is not dead loss."

"Then thou owest me something still," said she.

"I will pay that also," quoth Palombris, "if thou wilt tell me how. Then there will be no debt outstanding between us."

"Is that so dislikeable to thee?" she asked.

"I pay all my debts," he said, a little grimly, "and they are passing great creditors whose claim is such, that I cannot pay them."

"Constable," she said, more soberly, "why do ye speak so that none may understand you? Ye put your friends in the same place as your foes, and fence with them in words."

"Do I that?" asked Palombris.

"Nought else," she answered. "But there is a time for simple speech, as well as for close dealing."

"I meant no more than this," he said, after a little while, "that I pay my debts swiftly, and dismiss them. Then if I find one that may not be quickly repaid, by that token I know myself to be

in the presence of one who has done me great benefit, and I grudge him little."

"Dost thou account me a great creditor, or a small one?" said Viane.

"Whatsoever thou hast given me, I will repay again," answered Palombris.

"What have I given thee?" she asked.

"A chaplet," said he, smiling.

"I gave thee far more than that," she said.

"If thou wilt name it," said he, "I will surely give it thee again."

She twined her fingers together, and looked upon him, and looked away; and her eyes sought him again, and drifted away again; but he was as flint, and moved not at all.

"Thou art a marvellously hard man, Constable," she said, "and not wholly without cruelty."

"This is sure and certain," he answered, courteously, "that I will pay no debt I have not incurred."

"Give something in, then," she said.

"Not all things that I have are mine to give away," said Palombris. "I pay debts, for such is the rightful burden of all men; but in giving freely, we choose to our own content those to whom we give, and the choice falls in strange places, against the expectation of others."

She said: "Ye put me wholly in the wrong, and yet I ought not so to be put, for it is unjust, and over-hard; and ye silence me when it would be kinder to make the path easier for speech."

"There are some things I treasure so very much,"

he answered, "that about them I am indeed hard, and shall never be otherwise. And it will be good for you to understand, that some of us are more jealous concerning the things entrusted to us, than about the things that are our own."

"Nay," quoth Viane, "it booteth nothing at all. Ye know well that I set no store whatsoever upon the bloom and scent of the chaplet, nor do I desire you to render me again anything worth so little as they are. I wish for more than that, and well ye know it, however much ye make pretence."

"Demoiselle," said he, "I make no pretence. I wit well what thou desirest of me; and I say again, that it is a debt I have not incurred of thee. I will give again whatsoever thou hast given me; but I will not give thee a thing thou hast never given me."

She answered, proudly: "That, at least, is false, Constable. I am no light woman, bidding for the favour of men. Ask in Barbizen, and they will tell thee that I have despised them rather than enticed them; nor hath any man ever found favour from me."

"That I fully grant," he said, "and I would maintain the same in arms against any, if it were questioned. But thou knowest not what manner of thing love is. What couldst thou give me?"

"What can any woman give, then?" she asked.

"There is no name to it," he said. "It is the sun and the moon, and the seven stars and the host of heaven, and all the sunshine and flowers of spring, and a glory superadded which is too glorious to look upon and live. Thou hast not known what thou

wert touching upon ; the time is not yet come when thou canst offer me a gift that I have not already gotten. There will be a day to speak of love when thou canst find the man to whom thou art able to give the one thing needful to him, the thing he cannot do without, but would die for."

"But what is it ?" she asked, sadly.

"No man knows," he said, "until he sees it ; and no woman can tell who it is that will be the man. And this is good counsel ; though it is not counsel for every man and woman. But I have spoken to thee as if thou wert of the same mind as I am ; and I trust it is so."

He was so much the master, that she was utterly cast down, and knew not how to speak, or even how to think. She did not see when he left the garden ; but when Giroflanz found her, she was very pale and silent, yet smiled at him, and Giroflanz was surprised, and troubled.

CHAPTER VI. OF THE EXCEEDING HARD HEART OF PALOMBRIS

THE year wound round from autumn to springtide ; this winter was the best that had befallen in Barbizen to the memory of both young and old, for some luck was in it, and all things prospered, no one could tell why. The harvests had been rich, and the vintage good. Few men had much to grumble at, for the peasants looked to have a broad margin over their rents, and the lords to have their rents full and plenteous, and of goodly stuff. Moreover,

the merchants and the craftsmen found themselves with more business than they were able to encompass, for with a land all at peace their affairs greatly enlarged themselves, and one good harvest was enough to make wealth grow abundantly. Riches fell into Barbizen as though from heaven.

Men said : " Never of old were days like this day : we prosper under the rule of the little Constable."

Palombris said to himself : " The goose grows fat."

There were great festivities to boot, which gave the lords much to divert themselves with, and the people much to see. Palombris was restless, and was out and about all he might, ever in the palace or the tilt-yard or the feast-hall, or out with hawk or hound at due season. He kept a rich table, and bade many men to it ; and he brought it to pass that all Barbizen was in a fire of ardour from Martinmas to the first day of Lent, for men repaid his feasting, and one man repaid another, and they took to it as men will do, who have for long tarried in lean years. But Palombris gathered round him learned men as well as gay, and it was thought that the Constable's household was a place where all men might be met, who were in any way worthy of meeting.

Thus, because he himself led the way, he had respite from diverse troubles that vexed him, and he put a wall between himself and Viane. None the less, he knew that it was but a respite for a day ; but that day he needed, that he might clear off his hands the press of his labour, and see the realm

settled and ordered, and men at work in their appointed places. And he could not rest, because his heart hungered, and would not be filled.

When the days of Lent were come, Giroflanz came to him and said : " Hast thou quarrelled with Viane ? "

" Nay," answered Palombris. " But no doubt I shall do so."

Giroflanz cheered up somewhat, and smiled. " Well," he said, " she requireth of me that I bring you to her. Wilt thou come with me ? "

" Willingly," answered Palombris.

Giroflanz said to him : " Tell me how it is ; for I am sure in my heart that things are growing another way than they did at first."

" Nay, they go much as before," said Palombris, " for they go so utterly their own way, that it is never wise to build on one's own hopes. It is better to let them drift, and to follow the stream."

" I am not content," answered Giroflanz. " It would be a good match, and all of us would gain by it. Now thou knowest my mind on the matter. Forgive me if I am over-hasty."

" That is easily forgiven," said Palombris. " It would be well if events forgave men as easily."

But Giroflanz did not set great store by this, being too intent on his own thoughts.

Now Viane sat in a window, and Giroflanz brought Palombris there, and left them ; and after they had passed some small courtesies together, Palombris said to her : " I think thou hast some message to give me. Tell me what it is."

She answered : " I am utterly unhappy."

" I grieve for that," said he. " But in what way may I amend it ? "

" It may be beyond amending," she said.

" When things are that way," said Palombris, " it is always well to consider whether we should strive to better them ; for what God has created in sunder it is sometimes well not to join."

" It is easy for thee to speak so," answered Viane. " That kind of thing trips easily enough from thee, as I begin to perceive."

He coloured a little ; but presently he said again :

" I will shew reason why it should be truly as I say ; and if there be reason, then there is reason enough."

" I am not sure that I shall listen much to thy reasons," she answered. " Often I have wondered concerning thee, whether it were true as men commonly say, that thou art utterly cold and without heart ; and I believe it is so. But I am not of that make, Constable ; and I am not able to let matters drift into confusion, and then to solace myself with reasons. Of what art thou made ? "

" Of flesh, I think," he said, " and of blood, if it were blood which the swords of my foes drew, and not an illusion. Also, there may be some admixture of spirit."

" Then," said she, " tell me wherein I displease thee, for I think I must have done so."

" Thou art putting a hard measure upon me," said Palombris.

"Some men would not think it hard," she answered.

"I grant that," said he, "for they are much more made for thee than I am. But why should I beat about the bush? I was never born for thee, nor wert thou for me. It was not love that moved thine heart, Viane, but ambition, and pride; and not knowing what love was, thou didst mistake it for love."

"Art thou so wondrous wise," she demanded, "that thou knowest not only thine own heart, but also mine? Truly, a very great wisdom that would be."

"Nay," said he; "not so great a wisdom. Even the simplest man knows whereon his heart is set; and he understands whereon the hearts of others are set, for who can hide these things? They are plain for all to see."

"Yet I have humbled myself," she answered. "For whom else would I ever have done this?"

He shook his head, and said: "Ye will stoop, to rise higher, ye will humble yourself, to be exalted. That is all there is to it."

"Art thou the man to exalt me?" she demanded. He saw now that she grew angry; but he had not looked for much else.

"Sure I am," answered Palombris, "that it is my fame ye covet, and not myself."

"Thou wert wrong there," she said. "For no other man would I have done what I have done. I supposed thou wert but of a modest nature, and I made paths ready for thee; but thou

wouldst not take them. Why then accuse me of them ?”

“ I pray thy forgiveness if I seem to do so,” he answered. “ I do not reproach thee for them in any wise. Only this I say, and will hold to, that we were not born for one another ; and thou didst deceive thyself, and deem that thou wert in love, but it was no more than vanity and desire of glory. Hadst thou loved me,” he said, “ thine eye would have been wondrous quick to perceive what I loved and hated ; but thou couldst never contrive to see them. Ever thou wert on the wrong path. Thou art wondrous fair, and so marvellously deft that many times I was outwitted ; also, thou art strong of heart, and not unwise ; but never couldst thou see whither I went, nor what I wished for. And so it will ever be unto the day of our deaths.”

“ Constable,” she said, “ hearken to what I shall say. Thou knowest not women at all.”

“ True,” he answered. “ I never sought to know them, for they do not draw me.”

“ So it comes about,” said Viane, “ that thou knowest not what thou art dealing with. Ye put a wrong name on each thing as it comes up : and thereby ye do me a bitter injustice and hardship. Many men do this towards women, misnaming things, and turning good into evil. I am called proud ; but what name is given to those women who are not, who wed men they secretly think of little worth ? There was none whom I deemed of such worth that I could love him ; I should have thought it an evil thing to wed even the greatest

lord, unless he had been mighty enough to be a governor and a master to me, but it was not for the power he had, that I should have desired him, but for that which gave him his power, namely, the craft and valour of his soul. And it was much more than desire of glory that made me turn towards thee ; it was an old dream, that seemed now likely to be fulfilled."

Palombris studied in his mind, but answered nothing.

Then said Viane : " Often I dreamed of some prince or king who should come to seek me ; he would ride on a white horse, and his bardings would be of crimson leather, and a white falcon would sit upon his wrist, and two great hounds would leap beside him, one at his right hand and one at his left. His hair would be dark, and curl on either side in long locks. But I could never go further than this in my imaginings, for I knew not what I desired him to do, save that he must be an exceeding mighty man. And then I would hold his hand, and he mine, and with him I should be safe : and that would be the fairest of days."

" Some questions," said Palombris, " have no answers, for they were wrongly asked from the beginning : and it is labour wasted to strive with them."

" Was it so very foolish a dream ? " she asked.

" It was a wise one," he answered. " But I am not the man in the dream. Moreover, thou hast not yet told what thou wouldst give him."

" Thou art ever harping on that string," she said.

“It is still somewhat out of tune,” he answered.
“It needs keying yet a little.”

“Thou speakest as if love were give and take,” said Viane.

“We are at cross purposes,” he said, “and so all the answers are crooked.”

“Constable,” she said, “why is it thou wilt not believe? See how hard I try, and how much shame I have swallowed, to persuade thee that I cared.”

“I grieve for it,” he answered. “As for me, I am hard pressed, and brought to bay; yet it is not possible for me to be as thou desirest.”

She said: “Let me name the things I can give.”

“Do not so,” he answered. “The end will be the same. Have I not striven hard to dissuade thee?”

She said: “I can give thee myself, that am no changeable woman, nor feeble of spirit.”

“I believe thee well,” he said: “but some other will find that more to his perfecting.”

She said: “I can match thee, for I am the first among women as thou art amongst men.”

“True,” he said: “but I shall not be filled.”

She said: “I can bring great power unto thee, both through myself and through my House.”

“I know it,” he answered, “but I must dispense therewith, if it so prove needful.”

She said: “I can give thee great riches.”

“None more so,” he answered, “but I must do without it.”

She said: “What more dost thou still desire?”

“That,” said he, “is a matter to be thought over.”

Then she knew the truth : but without changing her voice greatly she said :

"Then, Constable, if it be so, I will name the thing thou shalt give me in return for the lost bloom of my chaplet ; and we shall be quits."

"I pray thee name it," he answered, "and I will pay it, if I may."

She said : "Give me the iron buckle : it is old, and ugly, and but of iron."

He started, and answered : "Demoiselle, it is not to be parted from, for it is not mine, but another's."

Viane had looked for no other answer : and by now she was in the toils of an anger that was bitter to bear, and turned her heart sick. For a little space they stood regarding one another ; and then she set her arm upon the window sill, and looked steadily out over the garden. So when he saw that she had no more to say, he bowed, and withdrew.

Giroflanz had kept watch all this while, and still stood by the door. But Palombris, as he came forth, saw him not, for he was in the deep shadow, but passed on and forth, and mounted his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER VII. OF THE ANGER OF VIANE

Now Giroflanz ran to a window, and saw Palombris mount and ride away ; and there was that in his manner which caused Giroflanz to run back as fast as he might, and seek Viane. He found her sitting

in the window, as Palombris had left her ; and she neither spoke nor moved.

He stepped beside her, and touched her arm, but none the more did she move or speak.

“ Viane,” he said, “ what is toward ? ”

“ Nay, get thee away,” she answered, “ for I desire to be left in peace. I hate the sight of all those who remind me of the Constable.”

Then he stood away a little pace, and stayed there in much turmoil of spirit, not knowing what he should do or think ; for he saw that she was very pale, as one that is dead, and he was affrighted, and troubled, and somewhat an-angered.

But presently she said, without turning round : “ I am the least happy of women ; for I have neither a lover nor kinsfolk. Sometimes a woman gives up one or the other, but I have neither.”

“ Nay, that is false,” said Giroflanz, “ for we of our House have ever been true to one another.” Then he cried out, and said : “ Viane, Viane, I pray thee tell me thy troubles, and what hath chanced, for I know not what to do.”

“ What doth it import to thee ? ” she said, scornfully. “ Go and ask the Constable thy friend.”

Giroflanz sprang back as though he had been pricked, and he answered : “ I have no friend who works ill to me or to thee : nor have I ever rated any man higher than my own kindred.”

But she would not answer, and remained there cold and pale ; and presently tears fell down her cheeks like dew on lilies, and she wept, and sank her head down on the window-sill. Giroflanz was a man

utterly distraught and amazed ; he knew nothing of his own thoughts, but stared at her, and saw only the wondrous glow of her hair, and the whiteness of her neck, and tears like diamonds, that caused his head to swim. So he went hastily away, and brought the old lord his father ; and they stood there together, regarding Viane. But she, for her own part, presently grew to hate their presence, and she rose up and fled away to her own place, leaving them there.

Said Giroflanz : “ I misdoubt but that mischief is afoot. What shall we do ? ”

The old lord’s brow had darkened, and he made answer : “ Truly, no good thing can have caused this. Go thou and seek the Constable.”

Giroflanz rushed out, and rode to the Constable’s hostel. The pages seemed to look for him, and made way for him, and he mounted the stairs that led up from the cloister into the great hall. Palombris stood before the fire, deep in thought.

“ Constable,” quoth Giroflanz, “ what hath come about ? ”

“ Truly,” answered Palombris, “ that were a hard matter to tell : and I do not think it belongs to my part to tell it.”

“ She will tell us nothing,” said Giroflanz. “ She is pale, and silent, and saith nought. I remember how it was that thou didst warn me that ye would quarrel, but I looked for something less than this. Who should bear the blame of it ? ” Even now Giroflanz so much trusted his friend as to ask this, sure of hearing a true answer, if any answer at all.

“ I will set blame on no shoulders,” answered Palombris.

“ Can it not be amended ? ” said Giroflanz.

Palombris debated in his mind for one short moment ere he answered. He had but to lay his hand sweetly on the shoulder of Giroflanz, and look into his eyes, and Giroflanz would love him as well as ever, and have trust in all he said ; and it might be that Giroflanz would prove loyal to his friend and companion in arms rather than to his own house. But when Palombris thought of him, his heart was moved with compassion ; for Giroflanz was in no wise one of those men who go their ways hardy and untroubled, but it would darken the sunshine for him, and he would never be happy thenceforward, but whichsoever part he clung to, he would yet love the other, and desire to be with it, till he was torn asunder between them. Palombris thought this a cruel doom to bring on a friend, and he deemed Giroflanz best with his own folk.

So he said : It can not be amended. There is nought to amend.”

“ How can that be ? ” demanded Giroflanz. “ I pray thee give me some message, or tell me how to act, or else relate to me what hath come to pass, so that we may devise a remedy ; for matters should not remain as they are.”

“ I will not give thee any message, for I have none to give,” answered Palombris. “ And I will not tell thee any thing, Giroflanz, but I will leave Viane to tell what she thinks fit.”

"Tell me surely that thou art in the right," said Giroflanz, "and I will believe it."

"I will not do that," answered Palombris.

"It will look ill," said Giroflanz, his trouble growing upon him. "But say that thou art in the wrong."

"Nay," said Palombris, "be content that I am silent."

"Thou makest it a great matter," said Giroflanz. "We all know that lovers' quarrels are the renewing of love. Be not over hard with it."

"This is not a lovers' quarrel," answered Palombris.

"Then in the name of God, what is it?" demanded Giroflanz.

"Let Vianè give it a name," said Palombris. "I do not promise to acknowledge it, but I promise that I will not deny it."

"Art thou hard set thereon?" asked Giroflanz.

"Yea, truly," quoth Palombris.

Giroflanz looked upon him, and then fled out of the room, and down the steps; and he mounted again on his horse, and rode home.

There were diverse serjeants in a room close to the gate of the court, playing backgammon. When Giroflanz rode past them, one tarried a space, and said to the other:

"Did I hear a crow, friend?"

"Somewhat like it," quoth the other. "But let us wait till it settles."

And this while they did not look up from their board.

When Giroflanz had related this tale to the lord his father, they consulted together, and were not pleased, for things did not seem to them to be going right.

"Hath the Constable any ground for displeasure?" said the old lord.

"If he will not declare it, what can we do?" demanded Giroflanz.

The old lord frowned deeper than ever, and answered: "This hath a look that likes me not at all. But tarry a while, son, and I will go and speak with thy sister."

So he departed; but Viane was much as she had been before.

"I have no kinsfolk," said she. "I will not speak to those who care nought for me."

So the old lord came back, biting his lip, and sorely at loss.

"Let us find her mother," he said. "It may be that this is a woman's business."

Thereupon they sent for her; and she was in all ways just such a dame as would well have been Viane's mother, for she was a handsome woman, and mightily clear and wise.

"Ask nothing of us," quoth the old lord, "for I desire thee to find it out thyself; but go to Viane, and discover what it is that lieth on her heart, which she will not tell us."

The dame was quick at that, and she nursed and persuaded Viane very deftly.

"I have no kinsfolk," said Viane.

"Try us, first, and see," answered the dame.

"Ye will put trust in the Constable, rather than in me," quoth Viane.

"They who claim first, are apt to get the crown," said the dame, cheerfully. "But have thou faith in thy men kindred, sweet; they will take thy part swiftly enough when they know where the quarrel lies, and they will amend matters to thy content, or I will have reason from them."

And so long and so sweetly she comforted her daughter, that presently Viane was somewhat assuaged: and although she fell silent, yet the chief part of her anger died away, and she could think again, and only awaited a due time to speak.

Then she said: "Madame, I am distraught to death, and utterly amazed; nor do I know what to say. All things seem to be evil, and every word is the wrong word to speak."

"It is oftentimes so," quoth the dame. "But set thy trust in me, and I will counsel thee well."

"I desire that the Constable should be slain," said Viane, "but if he were slain, I think I should slay myself. And I hate him exceedingly, and myself also; but certainly there is no man like him. And I know not what I want." And she wrung her hands together bitterly, and would not look round.

The dame said: "Either thou wilt slay him or wed him; for never shall a woman hate any man so much, and not do one or the other."

"I would do both," answered Viane, "but I know not which first." Then she laughed a short laugh, and said: "Now I have spoken the truth."

I can tell that by the folly of its outward seeming." And after this she was greatly calmed, and said :

"Madame, do not think me discourteous or neglectful. I know that all thou sayest is true, and I trust thee and my kinsfolk, and your wisdom. It may be that I have been foolish, and set my heart unfitly."

"No daughter of mine and my lord's can set her heart above her fitness," quoth the dame. "There may be men beneath her, but none above."

"Madame," said Viane, quietly, "thou art passing kind, and most comforting. But perchance thy thought is not that of others."

"When have we asked the permission of others?" said the dame. "Surely this is true, that we enforce our own dignity; and thereto we have both the valour and the might."

"Times are changed now in Barbizen," answered Viane.

"Not in all ways," quoth the dame.

"I am comforted, then," said Viane, meekly, "for if it be so, then I am not utterly in the wrong."

"Wherefore shouldst thou be in the wrong?" asked the dame.

Viane answered: "In this, at least, that I came near to thinking that I had brought upon myself this trouble. Wilt thou tell me what there is in me, that should displease the Constable?"

"Nay," quoth her mother, "I know of nothing."

"Then," said Viane, "I pray that he may be asked."

The dame went back to where the old lord and Giroflanz waited, and she told them this. They received it gloomily enough.

"I have asked him, and he will say nothing," quoth Giroflanz.

"What can she mean?" demanded the old lord.
 "Why cannot she speak plainly?"

Then Giroflanz and his mother regarded one another, and she said: "We shall know more of the matter before much time has passed. But I think it is clear that whatsoever hath chanced, the Constable is a marvellously proud man."

The old lord made a gesture, and answered: "I will go to see him. Bid them fetch my horse."

When they rode in to the Constable's hostel, that serjeant who had spoken aforetime said to his companion: "The crows are gathering thick."

"Let them gather. What is it to us?" said the other. And they did not look up.

But they played on, and presently that company rode out again. Then the serjeant rose up, and cast aside his dice-box.

"Whither art thou going?" demanded his friend.
 "It is yet early."

"To polish up my arms," quoth he. "The time is coming when the revels of Barbizen will have need of us."

Said the friend: "That is no news. Thou art a day behind the fair."

CHAPTER VIII. HERE IS TOLD OF THE KING AND PALOMBRIS TALKING IN THE PLEAUNCE

Now it is to be told that upon a day the King called Palombris to walk in the pleaunce with him, as his wont was when the weather was fair. And after they had walked a little, and studied the first spring flowers that were pushing up through the ground, and had spoken of many small things, the King said: "I pray thee not to be angry with me, Palombris, for what I shall say."

"Messire," answered Palombris, "ye are the King; and thou art also my very good friend, and the friend of my mother."

"I am glad thou bearest that in mind," quoth he. Then he said, part in idleness, part curiously: "How would it have been with thee, had I been more than her friend?"

"I should have been the same man as I am now," answered Palombris, "but perchance a little less strong of body, and a little less grim of mind."

"Dost thou verily think so?" said the King, much struck by this.

"Yea," quoth Palombris, "I think it would have been so; for a man's parents prepare his body, but his soul is from God. Therefore his soul would be the same in any case, whosoever created the casket to hold it."

"This comforts me much," said the King, falling into thought. "For now I feel as though thou wert after all my son, close to my heart. And I can with

more happiness return thanks that thou art enshrined in a worthier and more redoubtable casket than I could have wrought for thee. But this is not what I was intending to say."

"Let me hear whatsoever is good to thee," answered Palombris.

So the old King said : "Thou art of all men the coldest with women ; yet I deem thee like to be a good lover, if I am not mistaken."

"Messire," said Palombris, "I hope that is true."

"I think it is," quoth the King. Then he said : "Not treating them lightly, nor unjustly, nor cruelly ; but rather with faith, and courtesy in all things, setting their happiness before thine own."

"These words please me greatly," answered Palombris, "for so I desire men and women to think of me."

"Dost thou know," said the King, "that all men and women speak of thee and think of Viane ?"

"Yea, I know it," answered Palombris.

"But they do not speak of it always in the manner thou wouldst wish," said the King. "It comes to our ears that great trouble is afoot therefor. Now, this toucheth us so nearly, that I desire to speak of it. I understand that such displeasure has arisen between thee and the kinsfolk of Viane, that now there is a wide rift between men who are old companions, and should be friends."

"It is as thou sayest," answered Palombris.

"I pray thee to tell me why this should come to pass," quoth the King.

Palombris answered : "I will do so, but I shall

do it better if I wait until thou hast spoken all that is in thine heart ; for I perceive that we are entered upon a new path, and to-day will see great changes for us all."

" Not to our unhappiness ? " asked the King. " I am an old man, and like all such, I dread changes, lest they be for the worse, and give us discomfort."

" I trust that they shall be to our content," quoth Palombris.

The King mused ; then he went on, and said :

" How can I amend this grievous case, which giveth me great trouble of heart ? Is there any word I may carry secretly, or any thing I may do, to remedy it ? "

" Dear sir," quoth Palombris, " there is none."

" Hearken," said the King, drawing him closer. " It has been widely bruited these two years past that there was somewhat between thee and Viane ; and many have foreseen a match of it. Yea, even I have had these thoughts. Now tell me : wilt thou wed Viane ? "

" Messire," answered Palombris, " I will not wed Viane."

The King wondered a little, and said : " Was it ever thine intent to do so ? "

" Nay," answered Palombris. " Never at any time had I such intent."

The old King wondered more than ever.

" Bethink thee, little Constable," he said, " that Viane is of a great house, and may not be lightly treated. What hast thou done to make us think that any thing runs between you ? "

“Thou also art a man of courtesy,” said Palombris : “so think ill neither of me nor of Viane.”

“I will ask thee another question,” quoth the King. “Wouldst thou wed Viane if I desired it ? She is well worthy, and fair, and her house exceeding powerful, and they have ever been friendly towards us ; and there is no ill in her, for she is no worse than young and ardent of heart.”

“Messire,” answered Palombris, “I am caught in a net ; but I will not wed Viane, either now or then, and I have never given reason to think I would.”

The old King said nothing for a while ; he saw that trouble would come, and that he could not avoid it in this way ; yet indeed he could not guess why there should be trouble, nor where lay its root, nor why ill-blood should grow up between Palombris and Giroflanz. But so it was, and all men knew it, and they all said truly that it was because of Viane ; and so waxed greater the feud.

But presently a new thought came into his heart.

“I should grieve,” he said, “if thou wert never to love any woman ; for then one woman would miss the sweetest of all things, and I believe not that any other man would be a nobler lover than thou, little Constable, who conquered the marches.”

“I will not say that I think that ill said,” answered Palombris, colouring and smiling.

Then suddenly all things became clear to the old King, and he marvelled at himself.

“I pray thee tell me her name,” quoth he. “I see now that we have been blind too long. Thinkest

thou that I would not give thee good help, and my blessing ? Think it not, cousin, for indeed nothing will give me greater joy."

Then in a breath, before Palombris knew it, all was told ; and he was saying : " She lives in Greenwood. I will not love any other, or wed any other. I have not seen her these eight years : but we have written letters." And with the telling, it all drew so near to him, and became so real, that he was shaken, and changed countenance suddenly, and his words failed ; for this was a great and deep secret, that had been close hidden in his heart, and to speak of it for the first time made him feel as though it were the reality, and he himself the dream.

" Eight years is long," quoth the King.

" Messire," answered Palombris, (and the King knew that he spoke with more than his lips,) " if I may not have her, I will have no other, but fall upon Kol's sword ; for I have waited eight years, and changed not from then until now."

The King found a seat, and sat upon it.

" Palombris," said he, " I love thee as mine own son ; thou art very dear to me,—not as a kinsman or a friend, but as one whose heart is twined with mine, and who bears in him the fruit and glory of mine own youth. I am full of terror at this thing."

" Wherefore, dear lord ? " asked Palombris.

" I fear lest it be a fantasy," said the King. " It may be a dream carried over from the earlier time, while other fancies have been worn away. When thou goest to Greenwood, thou mayst find some one

with all the face and form of thy dream, but not the woman thou wert thinking of."

Palombris turned very pale, even to hear this said ; yet forthwith his blood flushed back again.

"Nay," he said, "dreams of that kind do not last so long, dear sir. Thou art furnishing me with sure proof that it is no fantasy."

"It was a trouble to me about Viane," quoth the King, "but this is worse, for it may strike at thy heart, and destroy what we have loved so much in thee. Thou art so strong, that if this dear dream proves but a dream, thou wilt eat thine heart out for grief and pain, and be glad no more, and no woman will ever have the bloom of thy love, the which exceedeth gold in preciousness. For this reason I dread Pallogris, and I am fain that thou shouldst not stake thine happiness upon her."

"What if the dream prove no dream?" said Palombris. "If it be real, then marvellously real will it be, past words and any speech of man."

The King was silent : but anon he answered :

"Yea : but it is long since ye have seen one another, and it may well be that thou knowest not how much thou hast changed. Ye were children then ; now ye are man and woman, grown to full age. So many changes have come to you both, that ye may be different now from what ye formerly were. Who has not heard of such things ?"

"Dear lord," quoth Palombris, "I never had any desire but this. Had my life been so shaped, I would have served as Jacob served Laban for Rachel, shepherding sheep. But my days pointed

another way, and I served a great earl in apprenticeship to war and governance, and I conquered a kingdom, for no reason but that I might go back to Greenwood, and bring Pallogris to dwell with me till we die."

"Never did I hear of a man conquering a kingdom for that end," said the King, puzzled.

"Yea, but I have," answered Palombris. "Or if it be as thou declarest, then I will be the first, that others may do likewise. Nay, I will be the first, for my own pleasure and delight, and the delight of Pallogris."

The King said: "There are many women in Barbizen, all of them fair and good, and desirable to the body and soul of men; demoiselles worthy of honour and fair fortune in love. Some of these thou couldst wed, and be happy withal."

"Nay, dear sir," answered Palombris. "Thou art widely in error. For only that man may conquer and rule a kingdom who is a great lover: namely, he who is steadfast to death, and unchanging, and careth for his love more than for himself, and will give his life therefor: a man wise, and crafty, bold to look hard things in the face, and deft to avoid disaster, and quick to bring in good luck. Truly, a king and a lover are crowned with the same crown, for their gifts are alike."

"I am minded to rend my clothes," said the King, humbly. But he smiled, none the less.

"Nay, dear sir," quoth Palombris, "see how good a lover thou hast ever been."

"Little Constable, little Constable," said the

King, "there is no prevailing against thee. With force, or with fair words, or with counsel, thou canst move mountains."

So they fell altogether silent.

Said the King, at length : "Is she fair ?"

Palombris answered : "I know of none so fair as she is, nor any sweeter to me. For beside her, all the utmost beauty of other women seems a thing of nought, and dead, without power."

"Well," said the King, "I am drawn to consent. I will not go against thee, notwithstanding that some dread of the issue still clings to my mind, so that I am uncertain and hesitant. But I can refuse thee nothing, and were I to do so, thou wouldst swiftly persuade me."

Palombris thanked him, and kissed his hand. But he stood up, and laid his hand on the shoulder of Palombris, and said :

"But now, since thou hast told me this, it is my desire that the matter should tarry no longer. I am too old to wait, and I shall dream ill dreams until the truth is assured. It is my will that thou goest forthwith to Greenwood, to see her, and to know whether it is as thou thinkest. But," he said, "one thing only I desire thee to promise me, Palombris. When thou goest to Greenwood, go as one who goes for the first time ; and when thou seest thy playmate, see her as one who has never seen her before. Take with thee no thought and no hope in thine heart, but look upon her as any other woman."

Palombris walked aside. A long while he stood

regarding the ancient wall, up which grew pear and plum trees. Then he turned again and said :

“ I will promise this ; and gladly, because in no other way ought I to go.”

“ Hearken now,” quoth the King. “ I will tell thee why I require this promise. Love cannot be built up out of memories ; for days change, and we change likewise, and we know not whether those who are far away are changing in like manner. But love must be renewed and freshly born each moment, and with those who love truly, it falls out so. Then if thy love be built up of memories and fancies, thou wilt find it fade and fail when ye come face to face ; but if it be true and wisely set, then it will be as strong as ever, and stronger yet : and it will seem as though but a little day had flown over your heads. So go.”

CHAPTER IX. THE SETTING FORTH OF PALOMBRIS TO SEEK PALLOGRIS

PALOMBRIS passed from the pleasaunce like one in a dream ; and he sat down, and smoothed out a parchment, and wrote a letter to Pallogris ; and the more he thought of it, the more he trembled, and the stronger he grew, with sudden hopes, and fears, and strong starts of will that had not touched him heretofore, while he expected for nothing, and all was yet far off. And he wrote :

“ Playmate : Add together all thou hast, and wait at the little path that leadeth through the sapling brake. I deem the saplings are well grown

now. He who beareth this letter will tell thee a day ; and I shall come for thee, and bring thee to Barbizen ; and if thou art not there, I will seek all over the world till I find thee."

This he sealed and sent : and when he gave it to an esquire, he said : "Thou wilt have no hard journey."

"Thou hast cleared thine own road, messire," quoth the esquire. Palombris was well pleased at this word.

He lay down upon his bed, and thought that this was a new day. He remembered the sapling brake with a gladness that was almost become a pain ; and then with a joy that was all gladness, since he should behold it soon. And in his mind he saw Pallogris standing there and waiting.

And after a day, so that Pallogris should have the letter before him, he chose a company, and set out for Greenwood.

BOOK V.

PALLOGRIS.

12-10-1918

10-10-1918

CHAPTER I. PALOMBRIS COMES ONCE MORE INTO GREENWOOD

SPRING was green and fresh when Palombris came again to Greenwood ; the sky was blue, and the blossom was on the bough, and all things were starting into growth and delight, his own heart amongst them.

As he rode along the leafy ways of the old grass grown path, his heart was stirred within him. It was a strange yet familiar place, and full of sweet presences, and yet empty ; and its beauty and sweetness seized hold of him, and sadness filled him, —the soft and tender sadness which cometh of knowing the mortality of all things, and which, ere it become too piercing to be borne, turns into the sweetest of all joys. For the way is hard, and the fight fierce, and there is little sleep to the eyes, and little rest to the feet ; and the rose fades, and the violets die from under the banks, and we grow old, and lose the glory of the flesh ; and then there is no happiness but in the hope of the glory of God, whither all good things drift home.

Thus he thought, as he rode ; and the men of the Blue Bull followed him half a bow-shot behind. They knew not whereto he went ; but they saw that he went somewhither, and they fancied that some very wondrous thing lay at the journey's end.

Now it fell out that Heron, on a morning, went forth of his house, and went a little way down the road towards the wood. It was a fair day of April, with the sun shining, and he saw certain men come out of the wood, and stand gazing towards him. They were men fully armed, and richly clad, and one, who seemed to be their chief, glittered in blue and gold.

Heron was rooted to the spot, and right discomforted in his mind, for he knew not but that soon his house might be blazing, and he himself and his folk all slain. But he said to himself that when close looked at, ever were things better than they seemed at first ; so he went on down the path, and the armed men came to him across the green sward. The leader of their company set his hand on his heart, and lifted the other hand high in air, and then Heron knew that they came in peace. Yet who they were he could not guess, albeit he dreaded lest they be Flacandrin's men.

But when they came nearer, he had cognisance of that captain, and wist well who he was, and he ran, and laid his hand on the saddle bow, and his heart was rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"Sir," he said, "ye are welcome to this land of Wood-Isle ; and never was man more so."

"I thank you, Heron," said Palombris.

Heron answered : "I knew assuredly that ye would do well, and gather fame, and might, and so it has turned out ; yet I have feared much lest ill-hap come to you, and now I am glad to see you safely returned hither."

Then he led Palombris into his homestead, and

bade to him his men, that they should welcome the Blue Bull, and set food and drink before them ; and this they did, so that never were men better welcomed. Heron fetched forth secret things for them, things seldom seen, to do them honour. He threw open his great guest hall, and took from an oaken chest silken covers for his cushions, and napkins of the finest linen ; and he had a silver cup to set before Palombris, which was exceeding ancient and strangely wrought : and for the chief knights, great horns carved over with tales, and mounted with silver. All these things were very old, and marvellous to look on.

Then said one of the knights : “ Better are old things than new.”

Heron answered : “ The old have no value till the new are come.”

Afterwards the Blue Bull went forth of the house again, and the garth ; and Palombris and Heron sat and conferred together.

“ How hast thou kept the trust I gave thee, Heron ? ” asked Palombris.

Heron told what had befallen Pallogris : but of his own dealings with Hawk he said nought. Palombris went on to ask of this and that, and Heron gave him full account of all things, how they had gone, as far as he knew them. Palombris said very little ; but afterwards said :

“ Wilt thou come with me to Isle-Kol, and help me with thy counsel ? ”

“ Lord,” answered Heron, “ do not ask me that, for I should be misjudged.”

"What was it thou didst need my word for?" Palombris asked.

Now a thought had come to Heron, and he saw his way to do two things at once, both of which he had long desired.

"Lord," he said, "I am going to over-reach you."

"In what way?" demanded Palombris, smiling.

"I will not tell you that," said Heron, "since I think it best that ye should not know till it is done. Lord, also I have a prayer to prefer to you."

"I will fulfil it, if so I may," answered Palombris.

"Hearken then, lord," quoth Heron. "Know ye that this domain of Wood-Isle is held wholly in free tenure? So it is; for before the heathen destroyed the land, my father and grandfather paid no dues or service to thine, nor paid homage, but instead of that they paid yearly one man's war-harness to the King. And since the heathen came, no man has come hither to trouble me about that war-harness, so that I have for long paid nothing, and were I to keep silence, it may be that things would run on till I had a right of prescription, and became a free lord."

"I might enquire of thy neighbours concerning the custom, and put them on oath," said Palombris.

"Not so, lord," quoth Heron, "for many of them are in the same boat; nor do I wish to swear against them. I deem that many of the old titles are taking new ground in these days. But that is not what I wished to say. I desire to alter things somewhat; and namely, I would put my hands within thy

hands, and be thy man, and do homage, and confess thee my lord, if so thou wilt grant it ; and we will agree on the rent I shall pay to thee."

Palombris was greatly surprised at this.

"Thou art fully welcome, Heron," he said, "and I will not hide that I should seek to bring into my estate such men as thou, and such land as Wood-Isle, which is rich in sheep, and also on the road to Barbizen. For thou art a trustworthy man, in whom a lord would rejoice. But why dost thou do these things ?"

"Why," said Heron, "I have a game to play herein, as thou shalt see. Say not that I did not warn thee, lord."

"Truly," said Palombris, after debating the matter in his mind, "I see not where the trap lieth, save and unless thou shouldst be telling me untruly concerning thy former tenure ; which I do not believe thou wouldst ever do, Heron."

"Nay, that was true enough," quoth Heron. "But since ye consent, lord, I will do homage even now, and settle the matter."

"I do not desire to stand in the way of any man's rights," said Palombris.

"I have neither kith nor kin," answered Heron. "It has long been in my mind that ye should be mine heir ; so why not now, rather than later ?"

So after they had recalled diverse knights and esquires to witness, and such other folk as were about, Agatha brought a cushion, and set it before Palombris ; and Heron knelt thereon, and Palombris sat very stiff and erect, with his sword between

his knees. Then Heron placed his hands within the hands of Palombris, and confessed him to be henceforth his lord ; and swore faith and truth towards him, and delivered into his hands the whole domain of Wood-Isle, with its pastures, its woodlands, its streams, and all rights whatsoever therein that from of old had belonged to Wood-Isle, according to the custom testified by ancient remembrance. Then Palombris received Heron as his man, and swore faith and truth, and promised protection and assistance, to fight his battles by word and deed, and to do justice by him ; and then he bestowed on Heron the land of Wood-Isle, naming it without mistake in all the words Heron had used, and for this Heron should pay him one sheep yearly for the upkeep of his estate and the expenses of justice.

Then before Heron got up from his knees, he said : “ Is it now certain, lord, that I am thy man, and hold Wood-Isle of thee in fee ? ”

“ It is quite certain,” said Palombris : “ and thereto we have full witness to prove it in any court.”

So Heron was content, and knew that he had no more to fear from Hawk, for now the greatest and most powerful lord of Barbizen was his protector. Thereupon he told Palombris the whole tale of the dealings between him and Hawk, and Palombris listened, and at the end thanked him, and bade him be easy, for he himself would look into the matter.

Then Heron brought Palombris clean water in a basin, sweetly scented, and Palombris dipped his fingers therein as he stood in the porch, and dried

them on a fresh napkin of linen. And when he had gathered the reins in his hand, and stood ready to mount, ere yet the pages let go the horse's head, Heron handed him a horn of ale, and he drank of it ; for these were courtesies a man owed to his lord.

Said Palombris : " Thou hast counselled me nothing, Heron."

" What need ? " said Heron, cheerfully. " No man plants trees in Greenwood."

" I have been sad this day," said Palombris, " with the sweetness of hope long deferred, and the sight of things too dear for speech, or even for thought."

" There is luck in it," quoth Heron. " In such wise God broods over mankind."

" Tell me, Heron," said Palombris, steadfastly regarding the saddle whereon his hand rested, " why it is that now, when my delight is close to me, it has lost its home, and wanders in the waste."

" How dost thou mean ? " demanded Heron.

Said Palombris : " It dwelt in the red and the fragrance of the rose, and the gold of the sunshine, and the green of the trees, and in the fairness of her that I loved ; and to keep them ever fresh I avoided pleasure, that I might fix my heart upon their exceeding beauty, and some day enjoy them as a man does, who drinks after thirst, and eats after hunger. And the day is close at hand ; but it is not the rose, nor the sunshine, nor the green of the trees, nor the fairness of her I love, that now I want ; but my pleasure goes drifting abroad, and I know not what it is, nor in what it dwells."

“Why should I say ought to thee?” answered Heron. “Already thou knowest the answer. But hearken,—I think thou art asking me this to see whether my thoughts thereon will run as thine do. Is it not so?”

“Thou art not mistaken,” said Palombris.

“Well, then,” said Heron, “it was never the rose nor the leaf, neither sunshine nor beauty of body that thou wert delighted in, but that which makes them what they are. Wondrous good are all those good things withal; but this I am sure of, that never is man nearer to the secret spring of all delight than when he finds and looks upon the woman who was born to be his mate. For in her it is deeper and better than elsewhere. It is in the rose too, and the leaf, and the glory of springtime; ye know it when ye see it, and ye love it everywhere, but most in her.”

“Thou speakest well,” said Palombris, and waited yet a moment.

“Go thou on,” quoth Heron. “Do we not all of us know these things, how longing increases until it exceeds itself? It was meant to be so. But when thou comest in sight of the quarry, thou wilt forget all else save only it. But I am planting trees in Greenwood. Let me cease speaking.”

Palombris smiled, and sprang into the saddle, and began to ride away.

CHAPTER II. HOW PALLOGRIS WAITED BY THE ORCHARD GATE

PALLOGRIS had the letter that the messenger brought to her ; and when she had read a very little of it, her eyes swam, and her heart failed her. She looked at the messenger ; and he was a very great man, gloriously clad, with a helm inlaid, and rich armoury upon his breast : and his mail coat fell to his feet, as soft as a silken gown, although of steel.

She said : “ Tell me who thou art ? ”

So he told her his name, gravely : and also his house and rank ; and she listened, and was glad to rest for a little while in thinking of these things. Almost she would have desired to ask him what she should do, and whether everything might not wait one week, until she had thought about it ; or if not a week, then perhaps a day ; or if that were too long, then an hour : yet it was a magical dread that had fallen upon her, and all the flowers had grown bright and glorious. But he, for his part, was a young man, swift to see and to understand, and Palombris had picked him for his messenger because of this. He stood by his horse's head, holding the bridle, and seeing much more than Pallogris knew. For when he saw her, and considered, and understood, he fell on thought, wondering in his heart.

“ Demoiselle,” he said, “ though I come swiftly, I need not depart until I am minded. If thou wilt, I will even stop, and thou mayst bid me do whatsoever seemeth good to thee. Palombris will ride on the day appointed ; he is never early nor late, but

comes on the good hour. He will look for me only that I may welcome him into Greenwood."

"I have not read the letter," said she.

He knew that; and he answered: "Thou needest not to hasten over it, demoiselle. I will stay here, and not depart till thou biddest me."

Then he cast his reins over the saddle, and left her alone, sitting upon a bank by that ancient disused road that now was grown with grass, but once had led through the wood to Barbizen. Pallogris went through a little gate, and along a narrow path between trees, till she came to a dell in the wood. There she lay down, and read all the letter many times.

When she had read it, she sat playing with the long stems of grass, and idly picking wild flowers. What would he be like? And what had she grown to be? So very long now she had dreamed, and remembered her playmate of the woods, and never ceased to love him, and had comforted herself always with the dear memory, and the trust of abiding love that now had grown so passionately dear; for she thought of nothing else but of him, till he was her life, and her soul, and the very woods and flowers, and the spring and summer and autumn and winter; so that if he were not, all the world would cease. But now it grew into more than a dream, for he would come, and they would look upon each other again; and Pallogris wondered, and dreaded, and hoped, and trembled also without knowing whether it were for joy or for terror. And there were other matters that came to her thoughts

now, that made her sore afraid ; things that before had been far away, and as nothing beside love.

And he was coming through the wood paths, that round faced, dream-eyed playmate, who had smiled and kissed her, and been to her the earth and heavens, and all that was sweet and fair. Would he be like that still ? For now he was the conqueror of the marches, and the mightiest man in a realm, the great captain of men. And what had she been to him ? And what now had she become ? So as Pallogris sat there she wept for fear, lest any part of her long dream should be taken away from her ; and while she did this, she wept also for joy, because the dream might be true ; and she knew of nothing rightly or clearly at all.

Now the tale tells that she saw the messenger again ; he stood by a gate in an orchard, that once had been part of the pleasaunce of the old tower in Greenwood. He stood framed in the foliage, and blossom, young and grave eyed, and brown of face.

She said : “ There was a day named.”

He told her the day : it was quite near now, and when she heard it her heart melted again with great joy, for that it was neither a month nor a week (for these she could not have borne), but only a little few long hours, that would serve to wait in. She longed to ask the esquire concerning Palombris, but might not bring herself to do so, till he himself began to speak of him, and so told her many things pleasant to hear, and none at all that made dread

increase in her. It seemed rather that he knew what she desired to hear.

He said : " He is small, not big : he has small hands and fine, and wrists easily spanned, so that he seems to be still a boy, and he is modest of manner. But he is of great strength, and matchless hardihood, such as few men have." Then the messenger smiled a little, and said again : " He has round eyes, and his face is smooth ; and he is like this apple blossom, good to be near, for none ever cometh near to him but they see a marvellous delight in him, as of the blossom on the bough. None in his company is ever cast down or despondent, or expect ill days : for wheresoever he goes, he brings gladness of heart, and great sureness. And if I were a woman, I should desire him most of all lovers."

She said : " Why ? "

" Because," he answered, " he is never false, and never otherwise than cheerful of heart ; he is tender to all folk, so that many love him much ; none would fear ill from him, nor cruelty, save those who have done great evil. But if thou thinkest him on this account uncourageous, or over-meek, thou shalt not suppose so ; for he is full of fire, and readily undertaketh things that bold men shrink from, if it seem desirable to do them : a man courteous and measured, free in giving, and slow in taking back, very terrible to his foes. Yet still I know not what he might do ; but I know beforehand that whatsoever he may do will be glorious and worthy, so that songs might be made thereof."

She listened to this with comfort, for it was the

Palombris of old, always sweet and kind, yet ardent. She had seen him so of old ; so until now he had not changed.

The sun was clear and bright over Greenwood when Pallogris tied into a little bundle all the few things she had ; and told none whither she was going, nor why. It was a fair and balmy morning of April, with apple blossom thick on the trees in the old untended orchard ; and Pallogris was glad, and trembled only a very little, but yet was faint and unsure as she stood by the little path that led into the wood. Here they had often waited for one another, to go long ways into the deep wood, and there they had often met and lingered, until now the spot was full of them both, and of them were all its memories.

The same flowers grew there, and shed faint sweet scent in the fresh morning, and the same bracken and thick underbrake, and the same scent of the woodland was borne upon the air that drifted in. Pallogris sat upon the bank with arms about her knees, half hidden. She saw the messenger pass by, riding gently on his proud horse, and all mighty and splendid in his array ; but this she thought of as part of the flowers and the wood, and so she remembered very few things save the sun, and sweet hope ; but she knew also that when he came she would be able to say and to do nothing.

So she waited patiently in that trysting spot, wondering at the years, and how they made so little difference, but left whatsoever was delightful still

unchanged amid all changes. It was but yesterday that he had gone forth ; and all that had happened since had been as the growing of the rose ; and all things had grown into this, until she thought that it had been ordained of aforetime.

Thus Pallogris waited, with hope above, but measureless fear hidden deep in her heart.

CHAPTER III. HOW PALOMBRIS CAME THROUGH THE WOOD

Now as Pallogris sat by the trysting place in the wood, the sun climbed a little higher, and shone down between the trees, and dappled the thickets with flecks of gold among their green dimness. Pallogris remained sitting and dreaming intently, till she almost forgot all things, listening for the first sound of hoofs on the grass grown wood-road ; and yet it came not, but she listened unmoving, expecting each minute to hear it, and not thinking at all that it might not come.

And it came, for she heard something that was not yet a sound ; and in a little minute it became a sound of horses moving at a foot's pace ; and then she saw bright forms standing against the forest trees,—beautiful men in bright mail, whose long gowns swept to their ankles ; and some dismounted, but some remained on horseback, and out of those who had dismounted came one whose mail was gold inlaid, and his coat of blue.

She knew who it was, without mistake : for he trod softly and smiling, and every step he took was

the step of Palombris, unchanged from of old. He came all alone and glittering between the dark woods, not looking at her, but smiling as his eyes seemed to wander aside ; yet indeed he saw her who sat upon the bank, and she looked not upon him either, but sat sharply erect, gazing aside. And suddenly she darted into the wood, and leaned upon the little gate, half overgrown, that led to the path.

But almost before Pallogris could breathe again, some one was beside her, and had taken both her hands, and gazed into her face ; this she knew, although her eyes were shut. They were very small strong hands that gripped her thin ones ; and there came a soft voice of her playmate, saying : “ Pallogris, Pallogris, it is true that I am here again : an hour ago I left thee and walked into the wood, and a magician gave me bright mail, and many men to follow me, and I came back to shew thee, and thou art here still.”

And then suddenly this seemed so true, that Pallogris opened her eyes : and lo, a wonder, for there, holding her hands, was Palombris just as of old, and no whit changed. And all the years vanished like a mist, and it seemed as if only an hour had gone : yet not an hour only, unless it were an hour of magic, for something had made love sweeter and more passionate.

So in one breath it was the same, and not the same ; and all was as before, but better. Palombris laid his hand across her shoulder, and stood gazing into the wood a little while ; they both gazed

silently, until he smiled, and turned his head again, and said :

“ Playmate, thou shalt sit upon the grass, and I will sit beside thee.”

Then they sat down beneath the bushes in the long dry grass, and he drew off his cap, and laid it upon the ground, and ran his fingers through his thick hair ; and when he had done this, he looked again at Pallogris, and she shut her eyes.

So again she felt that arm cross her, softly, and he began to speak to her, and said :

“ Playmate, I pray thee fear nothing, for I love thee now as ever. And I have ridden many long hours in the wood, remembering thee, and thinking that now came the sweetest of all hours that God could give me : and I would not that our parting had never been, for it has made the meeting sweeter again. But indeed I knew not that it would be as sweet as this, nor that I should meet my love loving her more. I thought it would be as erstwhile, but it is better.”

Pallogris almost for a moment had touched his arm, as though to clasp it ; but she did not, for fear, until he drew her hand within his fingers, and clasped it, and held it against his heart. And this was not the old Palombris ; for this hand upon hers was wonderfully and immeasurably strong and gentle, and not the hand of a boy.

He said : “ Tell me, playmate, whether thou lovest me ? ”

She answered : “ Could I do ought but love thee ? ”

“And thou shalt come with me to Barblizen,” he said, “and we will dwell there together, and love one another until the last day of our lives. Thou shalt have a pleasaunce to walk in, with roses growing therein, and garments of silk, and a necklace of pearls, such as we dreamed of.”

She answered : “O, I will not go : indeed, I am not able to go. I will stay here still in Greenwood.”

He pressed her hand, and smiled, and said : “O, surely thou shalt not stay here, my sweet playmate.”

They were silent a little, and then she opened her eyes, and came closer to him, and looked up at him. The red of his cheeks was not now the fair pink of old, but burnt into him by fierce suns and mountain winds ; yet he had not changed.

“Palombris,” she said, “dost thou love me ?”

“Indeed,” he said, “I love thee, and without thee I will not live. I desire thee, my playmate, beyond all other things in the world.” And he clasped her to him, and kissed her, and caressed her cheek, as though his heart could never be fulfilled of that love ; and still they sat there, unspeaking, and he stroked her hand that lay within his own, and her head lay against his shoulder, till she was filled with utter peace and belief, and rested in perfect content. And she wished never to leave that place, but resolved to remember the hour they spent there, afterwards.

So she said then : “I pray thee kiss me again, and let me know that thou lovest me.” And a long while more they sat silent, almost as though they

were asleep, but looking together and smiling now and then. A bird hopped into the pathway, and eyed them askance, and hopped about peacefully, pecking with its bill, and drawing nearer or going farther.

“Wilt thou listen to me, playmate?” said Pallogris. And when he pressed her hand she said: “I will not go to Barbizen.” She looked up at him, but he smiled: and she began to weep softly on his shoulder. He kissed her and comforted her, but said nought at all; only he smiled the more compassionately.

She said: “O, I know now what I feared before: for I loved thee, my sweet playmate, and because of that I put my fears down, and deceived myself. I cannot go to Barbizen.” She feared that he would be grieved, but his face changed not at all. She said, timidly: “I am sorry if thou art grieved.”

He answered: “My playmate, I am not grieved: for whatever thou sayest, thou shalt go to Barbizen.” He smiled so that she could not but smile too, albeit it was through tears.

“I pray thee listen,” she said. “O, do not put aside what I say.”

“Every word thou speakest is dear to me,” said he.

“I am ugly,” she said, “and not beautiful: and although thou seest it not now, thou wilt see it afterwards, and I would rather have one sweet hour now, and no more, than that heart break.”

Palombris raised her head with his hand, and gazed upon her face. Very long he gazed, and then

smiled, and answered: "My playmate; dear, and gracious, and sweet thou art, and beautiful."

She said: "Thou art wonderful and great: there is none like thee, and some fair and wonderful woman, sleek-limbed and wise, is fit for thee, and not I. And so they will say in Barbizen." Pallogris wept again softly, for she believed all these things, and would not go to Barbizen, though it should break her heart in pieces; and she knew well that it would.

Palombris clasped her still closer, and answered: "Thou little playmate: O, thou little one: I will take thee into the strong tower of my heart, till thou forgettest these strange thoughts. I desire no sleek-limbed woman, for these I may take at my will, as is good to me. What will I do with these? I desire thee, my playmate, thou who art dear and gracious and loving: for thee I have waited, and thee I will have, and not any other at all."

She said: "Kiss me many times, that I may remember it; and then return thou to Barbizen."

He kissed her many times, and answered nought; so she said: "Wilt thou not let me go now?"

"Nay," said he. "I have fought, and borne many battles, and fared hard, and waited long for thee. I will not let thee go." And ever, after all she said, there was still that smile upon his lips, kind and tender, but never changing.

She said: "O, it cannot be: for I know that I am no fit mate for thee. Thou art glorious, and too great, and thou art most beautiful, so that there is no man fairer; and that thou wilt find out, and

cease to love me. And because of me thou wilt be laughed at, and presently destroyed, and all thy greatness cast down." . . . And so many things she said in her grief and fear, that she babbled on quietly till she could say no more. Then his face changed a little, and he said :

" My playmate : tell me thine heart truly. Dost thou love me ? "

" Thou art all to me," she answered. " I cannot live without thee. O, thou art my life, and without thee I cannot live. I have only thee."

He smiled again, and said : " Then I am content : and to Barbizen thou shalt go with me."

" O, I cannot go to Barbizen," she said ; and many times she said this. And he comforted her tenderly, but yet he answered : " To Barbizen thou shalt go, playmate."

And when that was over, Pallogris grew white and faint ; but swiftly she recovered herself, for she was strong. And she said : " I see that I must go to Barbizen " : and was glad she was going.

" My playmate," quoth Palombris, softly, " thou shalt be always my love, for dearly I love thee, and I will give thee gardens full of roses, and every fair thing, and we will dwell together."

" I fear I may die before we reach Barbizen," she said.

" Then I will die too, and follow thee," he answered. " It mattereth not, playmate : wheresoever thou goest, I will go, and wheresoever thou art, I will be : for I have come back to thee, and we will part no more."

“O, thou fair playmate,” she said. “I will go to Barbizen. Go not away from me : but I would that I could make thee as glad of heart as thou makest me.”

Presently Palombris slipped from the arms of Pallogris, and she saw him standing in the road. He walked to and fro bare-headed. His shock of dark hair was thick and silky, and every step and turn he took seemed beyond words wonderful to Pallogris. She sat meekly, marvelling very gladly in her heart, with that joy which comes in dreams. And anon he passed out of sight for a little while, and the road was empty, and Pallogris began to fear that he was gone, and would never come again. Sadness came upon her, until she rose up to run and see ; but as she rose up he came laughing and bounding up the bank, merry as a boy ; and he put his arm about her, and led her along the little path in the wood. They walked along it quietly, looking upon all the old familiar places.

The sun was bright, and turned the woodland to a glory of green and gold, and the shadow was cool and rich. Palombris saw all the places of his boyhood ; the spot where they had sat often, and made garlands of the wild flowers, and the spot where a rabbit used to come out to them ; but all the birds' nests were different. And they saw the place where Palombris built a castle. The castle was now much tumbled down. He tarried there a space, telling Pallogris of the Tower of the Sweet Winds. Presently they came to the ancient gate of an orchard, hardly now parted from the wood.

They passed through this, and strayed between the fruit trees, that were heavy with blossom. There he stayed a little moment, and drew Pallogris to him, and kissed her softly ; and thereafter they wandered on together without speaking, and at last came to a path again. They came upon it between the great tree trunks ; it was no more than a grass-grown path, which might not have been seen by those who knew not the wood. Then after a pace, they were in the wide open level before the gate of the ancient tower. Palombris gazed upon it.

A company of the Blue Bull stood in the gateway, and the doors were open, and pages and esquires were about. Palombris drew the hand of Pallogris through his arm, and said :

“ This is on the road to Barbizen, playmate.”

CHAPTER IV. THEY SIT IN HALL TOGETHER

So they went over the level, and as they walked, Palombris said : “ Now tell me all that hath befallen thee ; and whether thou hast been happy.”

She told him a little, and he listened, and added to it all that Heron had told him, and all that he had heard from his messengers aforetime.

“ I could not be happy lacking thee,” she said. “ And now it is all made up for, and there is nothing more to say. They wished to be kind and wise.”

“ Many folk intend to be kind and wise,” said Palombris, “ and no doubt it should be counted to

them as good ; but I think it is those who succeed that win to heaven in the end."

" Well," she said, " it is an old tale now."

When they came anigh the gate, she said again :

" Tell me, I pray thee, if these are great lords of Barbizen ; and what I shall do."

" Nay," said he, " these are but hardy and valiant gentlemen of the marches."

" They seem very kings in beauty and might," she said, trembling.

" So I would have them be," answered Palombris.

He walked on, turning neither to the right nor to the left. The little company of gentlemen saluted them profoundly, with great courtesy, and Palombris saluted them in like wise ; but neither said ought at all. Then Palombris and Pallogris came to the steps that led up from the court to the door of the hall, and she said :

" Who are these fair boys that stand by the door ? "

He answered : " They are our pages and damoiseaus, who learn under our guidance the arts of war and courtesy."

" They have learnt courtesy at least marvellously well," she said : " and if they are as bold in battle, they will do great deeds." For the pages saluted Palombris with wondrous ease and grace, and he them again.

So they came into the hall ; and lo, a great change had come therein, for it was swept and scoured, and the ancient oaken tables set as for a company ; but no one was there.

"Sweetest one," said Palombris, taking both her hands in his, "I rejoyce that my company pleaseth thee : and I have great hopes that they will never seem to thee less than they do now. But it is because I am a true lover, and delight in bold and gentle things, that they are as thou perceivest, not because I am wiser or more valiant than they. So when we are in Barbizen, we will shew forth this excellence of courtesy before all men and women, that they may perceive how happy a thing it is, and how desirable to follow. Then the land will be much amended."

She answered : "It is marvellously easy to love thee, Palombris."

"That also is as I would have it be," said he, blithely. "I will care for thee more than for the most precious of jewels ; for thou shalt be my crown and my jewel."

Now they sat down at a table on the daïs, which was spread for them, and Palombris beckoned to the pages, who came forthwith to serve them. A small damoiseau with thick dark hair stood near Pallogris, handing her dishes and pouring wine for her deftly, as though he knew what she wished for better than she did herself. They ate little, and all that while they spoke together of many things, for it seemed as if there could be no end to all that they had to ask and to tell one another. And as they spoke, the ancient love between them diminished in no wise, but a new one, strange and strong, began to weave itself, and although they themselves were

unchanged, something new was added to them, and at the end of that meal they were more than they were before, and knew it in their hearts, but they knew not how it came about. Withal, they were glad.

Then he dismissed the pages, and the gentlemen entered the hall, and sat down to table. Palombris and Pallogris sat and regarded them ; and she saw how tall and strong they were, great men of their hands, yet stately and well mannered. Palombris told her tales concerning them, swiftly one after another ; for he began at one end of the table, and related the name and lineage of that knight, and his deeds and achievements, and then did the like with the rest,—tales so many and so marvellous that they seemed to Pallogris like the reading of an old ballad book.

And he said : “ Thus we shall sit in years to come, playmate ; and I desired it to be thus to-day, that I might for the first time entertain my company in this tower, together with thee : and also that I might shew thee this.”

In due time they finished their repast, and then Palombris himself rose, and filled a cup with wine, and gave it to Pallogris.

“ Playmate,” he said, “ bear this cup to them.”

She did as he bade, and gave the cup to each in turn, and Palombris followed her with the flagon, filling the cup for her, until they had made the round of the table, and then he last of all received the cup from her, and drank.

“Messires,” said he, “I trust that when I am wedded, ye will love me no less than now, and my dame in like manner.”

Then this came about : one of the Blue Bull stepped up to Pallogris and took her hand, and kissed it, and said : “Demoiselle, I undertake to fight your battles and further your cause whenever need may be, asked or unasked : and to this I call upon the Constable to bear witness.”

“Nay,” said Palombris, shaking his head, “we are the King’s servants. None the less it is the right of every gentleman to devote himself, without witness asked.”

But although he would take no recognisance of it, they saw that he was pleased. Then all the rest took a like vow, and undertook to fight the battles of Pallogris and to further her cause in all points, come against them who might. And afterwards they assembled together and made the same vow on behalf of all those of the Blue Bull who were not present.

Now, it ran about swiftly that the little lord was returned to Isle-Kol ; and hither flocked a many folk, especially those who wished to be first in the field with whatsoever tale they had to tell. The prior and the prioress met on the way, and walked to the tower in company, before Hawk had time to harness his nag and set forth.

They found gentlemen at arms disposed throughout the tower, and pages and damoiseaus at every door : but when Palombris heard who they were, he bade them be admitted.

He was sitting on the daïs in his grandsire's great chair, and Pallogris sat a little behind him.

They welcomed him to Isle-Kol, and said :

"We are joyous to hear of the great advancement ye have achieved, lord. Had we known ye were coming, we had welcomed you in more fitting wise."

He thanked them, and answered : "I am here for but a short time, and before evening I shall be gone again on my road to Barbizen."

"Is it in your mind to make any provision for the governance of the lordship ?" asked the prior.

"Truly," said Palombris, "I am minded to leave a castellain behind me, who will enquire into urgent cases, and set to rights whatsoever may be wrong."

"We have fallen somewhat into confusion since the old lord left us," quoth the prior.

They hoped that he would say something which might give them opportunity to explain themselves ; but he answered : "That is not an uncommon case when a lord dies. But my castellain will send me due report, and later on I hope to return for a longer time, unless it be the King's will that another lord take up the fief in my place."

"Nay, lord," quoth the prior, "we hope that it will not fall out so."

"Well," said Palombris, "I am much needed at Barbizen, and if it prove that the fief takes up too much time, the King may desire it exchanged for another which may not take me so far afield."

"I hope we have done as ye would have wished?" quoth the prioress ; for matters were not taking the turn she had hoped.

"I shall hear thereof from my castellan," answered Palombris ; and he dismissed them very courteously, so that they could find no fault, and yet knew that they were far from his favour.

The prior bowed to Palombris and Pallogris ; but the prioress could not bring herself to bow to Pallogris, and made off hastily, vexed to her heart. But Palombris called her back.

"It is customary among us," he said, quietly, "to bow to her who will be the dame of the lordship."

The prioress flushed scarlet, and made her bow, and so departed ; and it was long ere she got over that day.

In the afternoon came Hawk.

"Ha, lord," said he, warmly, "I am rejoiced in my heart to see thee so well renowned, and so mighty in achievement, and withal so little changed. But truly, I foresaw from the first that thou wert born to great deeds, and so have I ever said."

"Come hither, friend Hawk," said Palombris. "How falleth it out that thine own report of thy doings differeth so greatly from the report made by other folk ?"

"Nay," said Hawk, "I have not heard of it."

Palombris was making ready for the road, and even now began to draw on his riding gauntlets.

"It hangs in my mind," he answered, "that when I passed through Sun-Isle aforetime, thou didst foretell nought but evil."

"Not so, lord," quoth Hawk, heartily ; "I have ever wished thee well, and do so now."

“Yea,” said Palombris, “I doubt that nothing at all. But ye forget many things, and are ever taking the will for the deed.”

Hawk was somewhat cast down, and sat in a chair without leave asked.

“I thought it would please thee,” said he, “if I came here with a welcome. Truly, it is not a false one, for I am an honest man.”

“I am pleased enough,” answered Palombris, “but I know that thou hast broken the peace, and caused ill will in the land, and therefore I am in the way to shake my head at thee, Hawk. Thou hast not done well by thy neighbours, but caused them discomfort and grief.”

Hawk was greatly hurt in his feelings.

“I know not, lord,” he said, “what I may have done to deserve this ; but it is ever the case that he who does ill is thanked for the good he never did, and he who does well is blamed for it.”

“Thou hast been a great rascal and evil-doer,” said Palombris.

“Lord,” said Hawk, “ever have I put thy good first in my thoughts, nor have I at any time sought evil for the demoiselle Pallogris. I have not wished to hurt any one. I acted for the best. How then can it be right to name me by evil names, as though I had sought to do ill ? It is unjust, as I call God to witness.”

Palombris laughed, and gave in.

“Let it go,” he said. “Friend Hawk, we repent of these violences we have spoken unto thee. ’Tis clear that thou art the best and wisest of men ; yea,

without doubt the very pink of perfection, such as we seldom meet in this world."

And he dismissed him with such-like high praises, whereat Hawk went home again, and for a day and a half was greatly puzzled. But when this too had been done, Palombris looked round the old hall, that now was empty again ; and he went forth, and turned the key in the lock, and gave the key to the castellan he had appointed.

"Take good care of the place," he said. "And presently I will send word what I will have done further."

CHAPTER V. OF THE JOURNEY OF PALLOGRIS TO BARBIZEN

Now he went down the steps, where Pallogris waited for him. A destrier was there, and a little cream-coloured palfrey that ambled easily. Palombris held the stirrup, and set Pallogris in the saddle : and he cast about her a cloak of soft stuff. When he had done this, he mounted his horse, and rode on slowly beside her, a little ahead ; and he blew upon a small horn, and in this manner they began their journey to Barbizen.

Pallogris rode thinking, and sometimes turning her head to see the horsemen who came far behind, with long spears towering up into the air ; but they never came near. Palombris whistled as he rode, and oftentimes wheeled his horse round, and called to the palfrey, which quickened and trotted after him ; and he smiled at Pallogris a little radiant smile.

And she was happy of heart to see him ride, and smiled when the palfrey trotted, and desired nothing but that they might ride in this manner always. They rode long ways together, side by side ; and they came to strange places in the wood, where she had never been, and all the glades were lovely to her, and so full of beauty that she remembered them always. It was the season when the blue-bells first shew their little spears in the grass, and along the banks. Palombris had a rich sweet voice, and he sang as he rode, and this she never tired of.

Then when dusk came, they found a path into a glade, and there Pallogris saw a small pavilion pitched. It was of yellow silk, and held a small bed, and all things as though it were the room of a tiny palace ; and there was also a demoiselle, to shew Pallogris the manner of it, and to help her. So she slept there, and the men of the Blue Bull lit their great fire a bow shot thence ; but Palombris wrapped his cloak about him, and slept on the bracken close by the pavilion, with Kol's sword beneath the cloak.

The next day, and the next they rode, sometimes more swiftly, but often more slowly, Palombris walking on before, and leading his destrier, and telling Pallogris of adventures. He told her strange and wonderful tales, such as she had heard of in ancient stories and the songs of the folk ; but these were of his doing and seeing, and Pallogris was full of strange wonder that even to them such things should happen, for she had thought that they happened always to other people.

They rode together in the clear sunny mornings, and it was as a dream to Pallogris, and as though the most wonderful thing in the world had happened, so that she was silent with joy, lest she miss one minute of that happy time. And they seemed quite alone in the woodlands, save that she could sometimes catch a glimpse of the men of the Blue Bull as they rode far before and far behind ; and the pavilion was ready every evening, like the work of a magician.

Palombris told her of Giroflanz, and of the marches, and of Flacandrin in the Wood Debateable, and of many-towered Barbizen and its pleasaunces ; and he told her of his journey to the edges of the wood,—here he slept, and here he ate the cakes and drank the wine she had put into his wallet. So at last they came to the edges of the wood, and he showed her the great hill that descended to the river, and the mountains towering far away. He told her of the people, and of his returning to them as he had promised ; and he told her of Kol, and of the Flowery Garth that lay on the river. Then she told him the tale as the old lord, his grandsire, had told it to her ; and they spoke long of it together.

Now, it has been told that Hawk went home again, and for a day and a half was greatly puzzled. He sat pondering over what Palombris had said, and deeming that it could not be wholly true that he was as good and wise as that ; yet so had Palombris avowed. Then at the end of the day and a half, Hawk slowly perceived that these words

meant the clean contrary of all that they said ; and when this dawned upon his mind, he was perturbed and troubled, for now it seemed to him that all had gone awry. And in the afternoon, when Hawk was just rousing from the nap he took after noon-meal, a friend of his came, and said to him :

“ What deemest thou, Hawk, as to the way Heron of Wood-Isle has done ? ”

“ What hath he done ? ” demanded Hawk.

“ What,” saith the friend, “ hast thou not heard of his doings ? ”

“ Nought at all,” quoth Hawk.

“ This is a right strange thing,” saith the friend. “ We all took it for granted that ye knew well what was to do ; and we waited, and at last I came as thou seest, to question thee. Knowest thou not that Heron hath yielded into the hands of Messire Palombris all the estate of Wood-Isle, and taken it again from him in fee tenure ? ”

“ What ? ” said Hawk, rising to his feet. “ Is this sooth ? ”

“ Yea, truly,” answered the other, “ for my nephew’s brother-in-law was amongst the sworn witnesses, and we heard of it from him. He hath talked of little else these four days past.”

As soon as Hawk could get the friend safely away from Sun-Isle stead, he rushed to the stable, and got out his nag. He rode to Isle-Kol ; but when he had come thither, he met a man who told him that Messire Palombris had already departed, and was well on his way to Barbizen. So Hawk hurried back to the stead, and harnessed the cart, for he saw that

he would need four or five days' fare, and that was more than Hawk of Sun-Isle could carry behind his saddle. He drove after Palombris as swiftly as he could, and came up with him at the halt on the river beyond Greenwood, just as Palombris was bidding strike camp and go over the ferry.

"Lord," said Hawk, "I have been turning matters over in my mind; and I begin to fear somewhat that I have been a fool."

"There are gleams of wisdom in thee, Hawk," said Palombris; but Hawk was not to be turned aside.

"I am not sure that I have done well," said Hawk; "but I am a slow man, lord, not over quick on the up-take. So I have come after thee to say that if it be that I have done ill against thee, right sorry am I therefor, albeit truly I do not see clearly the rights and wrongs of the matter. I will put all into thine hands, and let thee declare how it is."

Palombris answered: "I think better of thee, Hawk, in that thou hast done this. Return home, and be assured that I am not thine enemy."

"Lord," said Hawk, "Heron hath somewhat against me. If he should tell thee that I put up a fence on his land, believe him not. Thou canst come thyself and see, and thou wilt find no fence there."

"I will not believe a word about the fence," said Palombris, "until I see it for myself."

So Hawk thanked him, and returned home to Sun-Isle feeling somewhat easier in mind. And as

he went his journeys home, he saw so clearly how it would presently be, the fence gone, and the holes neatly filled in, that he began to think the fence already gone, and indeed that it had never been there at all. So he felt hurt that Heron should have said that a fence was there, when none was ; for it seemed unjust, and a thing needless.

And a day or two after, Heron found all the fences, which Hawk had put up, round the debateable land, clean gone ; and all the ground was made neat and tidy again, so that as little should be marked as possible of the places where the fences had been set.

Whereupon Heron smiled, but did not say very much. And no one ever heard further of Hawk's claims in that matter.

But Palombris and Pallogris said farewell to Greenwood, and were ferried over the wide river in a boat, by folk who ran to do the bidding of Palombris. They were strange and wild, and Palombris stood amongst them like some glorious king of heaven, and the sun shone in the water, and they came to land beyond the river. So they journeyed up the hills, and Pallogris saw the Dragon Haunt, and heard the tale thereof. They saw a man with a dog, who stood on a hill-side and cried :

“ Ho, little lord, thou art grown too great for me now ; but I wish thee luck.”

Palombris answered : “ Even so to thee, Hillman. The change of days has come, like as the tale of the Dragon Haunt thou toldest me aforetime.”

“ Well, they have built the tower afresh,” quoth the Hill-man. “ And what will I do now ? ”

Said Palombris : “ I am always at Barbizen.”

Pallogris heard this speech ; and the hills too were places of magic, and Palombris the fairest and mightiest man on the earth ; she would fain have knelt at his feet and hidden her eyes. She knew only that he loved her, as she him, and the magic of that was in the glorious hills too. So they came to the Debateable Wood, and he told her of his faring there, and of Flacandrin, many stories ; and so they passed through, seeing all the fair woodland, and the running streams and tangled brake, and the magic was in the Wood Debateable too. And on a day they issued forth of the wood, and passed over the rich plain land, and saw before them at sunset the turrets of the tower of the marches ; the magic was there also. They stood looking upon it gladly, and Pallogris said :

“ All places are beautiful, and full of joy and delight.”

He answered : “ They are beautiful to me, because thou art here ; there is magic in them. Aforetime they were marvellous, but nought more.”

She said : “ Strange it is, that I should make thee glad.”

So Pallogris was comforted, yet feared that at some place the magic would stop. He smiled, and pressed her hand, until she smiled too, and he said : “ Be not afraid, for here dwell John of the Marches and his dame, who are our friends, and none are better or nobler.”

They came to the draw-bridge, and passed over it, and entered a courtyard bare of folk in the quiet summer afternoon. Only there stood John and his dame, and Palombris embraced them both with his two arms, one with each arm, and said :

“I pray you welcome and take care of my love, for she is my heart itself, if so be ye love that.”

John answered : “ Palombris, she shall be our daughter : and I am not wrong but that we shall love her for her own sake, as well as for thine.”

“ I would fain have that so,” quoth Palombris.

Then for many days Pallogris rested there quietly, and was happy, for the magic was there too. She saw wondrous things, past belief, till sometimes she thought she had died without knowing it, and this was Heaven.

Palombris sat with her in a window, and said :
“ It may be so. Art thou sorry ? ”

She answered : “ O, nay.”

So he made up a long tale of how they had both died ; but they could not agree whether he had died first, and then she, for sorrow ; or she first, and then he, for sorrow ; for she thought one most likely, and he the other. Then they both smiled a little, for wonder, and Pallogris forgot this strange fantasy. He became dearer to her when she remembered the sad tale he made of them, and she was glad it was not true.

But before they departed to Barbizen, John and his dame spoke together when their heads were on the pillows.

“What will come of it?” she asked. “For it is strange.”

“There may be strife,” he said. “Therefore, if thou wilt permit, I shall go to Barbizen.”

She answered: “I should have desired that.” Then again she whispered: “What will the rest be like?”

“What was Kol like?” quoth John.

She said: “O, all that he did was great, glorious, and noble. He could not fail in anything.”

“Palombris is like that also,” quoth John. “Fear not, madame. Kol’s son is greater than Kol.”

And Palombris and Pallogris were happy and content; and a little while after, they bade farewell to the tower, and journeyed to Barbizen.

CHAPTER VI. HERE IS TOLD OF THE KING AND PALLOGRIS

Now the tale goes on to tell that Palombris and Pallogris departed from the Tower of the Marches, and drew to Barbizen. Pallogris saw all the fair country they passed through; the orchards, and corn land, and the tiny villages and the towns; and all were the greatest wonders in the world to her, who had known no more than Greenwood. But she was well content, and desired nothing better, and thought all things most beautiful and desirable.

John’s dame had given her women to attend her, such wise women as were of her own household, and

Pallogris learnt somewhat from these, and was not ever far astray, for she too was not unwise. And the King, who understood well what he should do, had promised that she should have a good home-coming, and be as content with Barbizen, and as quietly at ease there, as he could devise.

So they came to Barbizen in the early summer days, and Pallogris saw its many towers and spires, and its wondrous ring wall and mighty gates ; and they rode through its streets, and came to the court of the King, and there Pallogris rested, and presently sat in a little room alone. Then when she had rested, there came to her a small damoiseau dressed in white satin, the fairest child that ever she had seen, so that almost she thought him one of the fairy-folk. He bowed to her very courteously, and said :

“ Demoiselle, I am to be thy page and damoiseau, and to show thee all places in these courts ; and I will now show thee a garden.”

“ I will gladly go with thee,” she said.

So he led her through a door into a cloister, whence a gate went into the wide pleasaunces of the King ; and he showed Pallogris the flowers, and told her what gates and doors there were, and whither each led. He was a very courteous child, and yet but a child, and Pallogris liked him to be with her ; and he talked most wisely, and as a child talks. So he took her to a little bower in the pleasaunce, and said :

“ Thou shalt sit here, demoiselle, for now I am to fetch the King.”

Pallogris sat and waited, wondering what the King would be like, and half afraid that he would be terrible and wondrous, and would ask hard questions which she could not answer. But in a little while she saw the damoiseau again, walking slowly across the green sward; and beside him walked a tall old man, with a face shaven, and fine, and sweet, who leaned on his shoulder lightly, albeit he walked straightly and well enough. His vesture was plain, but it was pinned at the throat with a brooch of sapphire, and his eyes were kind and cheerful. So when the King came near, he took off his cap, and bowed low, and Pallogris made him a timid little courtesy. The King sat beside her, and the damoiseau sat on the grass before them.

"Demoiselle," quoth the King, "I trust thou likest my garden and the things therein."

"O, truly," said she, "it is more wonderful than I could have thought of."

"It is thine to wander about in," he said, "and if thou wilt, here thou shalt stay until Palombris has found a garden for thee. Thou art my guest now, and my ladies shall care for thee." Then after a little while, he said softly: "Didst thou greatly wonder what a King would be like? Wert thou much afraid?"

"I deem that I was afraid," she said.

"Well," quoth the King, "I will relate to thee all about that matter. I am an old man now, demoiselle, and I fear that I am a man of no import. Thou needest not to take much note of me; for

no one else does. At least," he added, presently, "no one save John of the Marches, and Palombris."

He smiled; and Pallogris knew not how to believe this, whether it were true, or but play.

"A king," said he, "should be many things; but I am not. They put a crown on my head long ago, and since then I have striven to rule in Barbizen. But when they disobey me (and that is every day), I know not what to do; and I have no force against them, and am not a wise man in war, nor a lucky man in any thing. So thou seest now, that thou needest not to fear me at all."

Pallogris began to like him very well, although it was hard to say why; perhaps because he seemed most kind and easy of speech, and not an ill man in any way in which men are ill.

"Thou art not afraid of me now?" said he.

"There is much magic in a crown," answered Pallogris, gravely.

"Dost thou think so?" quoth he.

"Yea, truly," said she, "or no man would have made ballads of kings."

"That may be a reason," he said, smiling. "But what is the magic? I wish I could find it: for then I might do something useful therewith."

"It is like flowers," said Pallogris. "They do not know that they are beautiful or fragrant, and they do not do any thing useful with it; but men love them for being what they are."

"I wish some one had thought of telling me that before," said he. "But I have been a helpless flower, if a beautiful one; and most men have not

always loved the crown I wear,—as Anguis, and Flacandrin. And dost thou not think it a sad case to be a king, and not to be able to rule one's realm, nor beat down those who are strong and wicked ? ”

“ It would be sad,” said she.

“ Damoiseau,” quoth the King, “ I pray thee find me the three fairest roses in the garden.” Then when the little page was busy looking, he continued to speak thus : “ It is a hard task to rule a great realm, when mighty men arise and will not be put down. And so it was in Barbizen ; for strong foes came up the rivers, and wasted the land, and strong barons on the marches, who desired to be kings themselves, strove against us, and proud lords here, who would not sit down in council, nor abate their voice for me. What thinkest thou that I should do ? ”

“ That would be very hard,” said Pallogris.

“ And one day,” said the King, “ there came hither a boy with a sword and a round face, out of Greenwood ; and he became an esquire in my court, and gained a name for patience and courtesy ; the sun shone upon him, for the luck of a great name was with him. So one day, in despair, part in desire to cast down his pride, and part in hope, and wish to see if his blood would tell, we sent him away to wild waste lands, where war was abroad, and our best captains had come home shorn of honour. So we waited to see what would happen, for if he might secure those lands, he should have greater honour than any one amongst us,—such honour as John has, who kept Debateable Wood

from seeding in Barbizen. But the boy was the true son of his father and mother, and while we waited, hearing nothing, men began to come in to us, and told such tales as we hear of in ballads ; and he conquered the waste lands, and put down beneath him all the foes of the realm, and came back as the mightiest captain in Barbizen, with a company sprung out of the earth, men of war and battle that he had gathered. And he conquered all the marches, and became greater yet ; and he was a boy with a round face, who, instead of overthrowing an old and foolish man such as I, that cannot reign nor rule, was as a son to me, and gave me honour and power, and bowed to me as no man, save John, had ever bowed. So to-day, demoiselle, I am a king, and when I bid any man do this or that, he doth it saying in his heart : ‘ O, for thee I would not do it : but I care not to have the Blue Bull in my fields.’ So I am a king ; or perhaps the boy is the king, and I wear the crown for him.”

“ I would have had him do that,” said she.

“ It was foolish of him,” quoth the King. “ I am but a helpless old man, not fit to be the ruler of a realm, whereas he is well worthy of a crown. What dost thou think ? ”

Pallogris answered : “ I love most those who are loyal and swerve not from their path. Best it was as he did it ; I would not have had it otherwise than so.”

“ Yea,” said he, thoughtfully, “ but why ? ”

“ He did as thou wouldst have done in his place,” answered Pallogris.

“ It is very hard to be wise,” said he.

“ Is it hard ? ” she said.

“ Is it not ? ” said he, smiling. “ Well, I do not know. It is easy for a bird to fly. An ox finds it a harder matter.”

Pallogris looked over the garden, that was filled with sunshine ; she loved well to be there, and to listen, and almost she would rather have heard the King, at this time, than even Palombris himself.

“ Ought I not to love my little Constable ? ” said the King. “ Could I give him too much ? I gave him an earl’s collar, and the sword of the Constable ; but then a man as wise as he would desire more than that.”

“ A man as wise as he ? ” asked Pallogris.

“ Yea, truly,” answered the King. “ For a man who is not very great values most praise and rank ; but the mighty men look on these as toys to be played with, and delighted in a little, but not sought for themselves, as ends. So a man as wise as he is would desire more. What could I give him ? ”

“ I do not know,” said she.

He answered : “ Surely a fair woman, the fairest in the world. That should be his repayment ; for the wisest men value women above all else.”

“ Yea,” said she, in a very low voice.

“ But he desired none save one only,” quoth the King ; “ and he brought her to Barbizen. Should I not be most eager to see her that he loved ? For if he is so mighty, what will she be like ? ”

She said : " O,—I know well : but I know not why. I am afraid."

" I am very well content," said he, earnestly, " and I deem he was a wise man in this, as in that. And thou shalt wed Palombris, and I will be ever thy friend."

" I cannot say why these things should be," she answered. " I fear every day that it will be found out, and then I shall die."

He smiled, and said : " O, nay : be of good heart. For I have known many women, and I know a little of women, and what they are. But," he said, " I will tell thee this, Pallogris, if thou wilt listen to me."

" O, I will listen," said she, ready to tremble.

" Thou art to think only of him," answered the King : " thou art his pleasure, and his happiness, and the root and source of his power : and thou art not to listen to aught that others say, nor fear for thy love because of it. And thou wilt be happy, Pallogris, if I know women and men ; but thou art to have no eyes or ears for any save him only."

" I wish for nothing but that," she said.

He said again : " Be of good courage, demoiselle, and be not afraid : for he who loveth thee is a mighty man, and he has dwelt always with thee in his heart. And thou shalt bear this in mind."

The damoiseau came running with three roses in his hand. " Ha," quoth the King, " hast thou found them ? Right well are they found, little lord. Let us part the spoil amongst us." So he gave Pallogris the finest rose, saying : " I give thee

this for a gift, and a fair offering, demoiselle, from Barbizen." Then he set the next rose in his cap, and gave the third to the damoiseau. "Were it of gold, little lord," said he, "it would be no worthier, but less."

So they arose, and passed into another part of the garden ; and there they saw one who walked to and fro in the pleasaunce, and it was Palombris. The King beckoned him near, and they all walked together, and the King said : " I am well pleased : and ye shall have a wedding fit for you : that is to say, the greatest since Kol was married."

"Thou art ever good," said Palombris, smiling.

"Love well," said the King, "and fear nothing."

He was content in his heart as to that ; but he was also wondering as to what Giroflanz would say. Yet he thought that Giroflanz would not stay that love tale. And now it shall be told of Giroflanz and his deeds, and what came to Palombris and Pallogris thereof.

CHAPTER VII. NOW THEY MAKE READY FOR THE WEDDING OF PALOMBRIS

Now Pallogris dwelt quietly for a space in Barbizen, ere yet she should be wedded to Palombris. And she saw but few folk, and those were kind ; for the old King was shrewd in these matters, if not great or powerful in ruling his realm, and he found those with whom Pallogris might dwell in peace, and happily. So there she stayed, more than content ; and they devised her wedding array, and brought

stuffs therefor, so fine and precious that hardly could she believe in them. It seemed to her even as a strange and very wondrous dream, and Pallogris dwelt in that dream, and belonged to it. She had her garden, and her little damoiseau, and every day of her life Palombris was in that garden at morning and at evening, with the roses and the sunshine, and the love between them grew fairer and happier and more sure, and deeper every day that passed. They spoke together or were silent, but whether in silence or in speech they were happy.

Pallogris saw the greatness and beauty of Barbizen. They took her to see all the fair places thereof; and the booths of the merchants and traffickers, who came from far countries; few there were that knew of her, or who she was, but this was as she would have desired. And the old King was every whit content, and loved her well and gladly, and deemed Palombris wise in love, as he had been wise in all his other farings.

John of the Marches came also to Barbizen. As they walked in the pleasaunce, the King said to him :

“ Tell me why thou camest to Barbizen ? ”

John answered : “ Because my dame bid me.”

“ She is a wise woman,” quoth the King. “ Thou shalt kiss her hand for me, and tell her so. But didst thou not resolve somewhat in thy mind before that ? ”

“ It is true we did so,” answered John.

“ And why ? ” demanded the King, smiling.

“ O,” said John, “ I came because——” But

whatsoever he had been of the mind to say, he let it drop, and said no more.

"Yea," quoth the King, smiling afresh, "I understand thee well enough, John. Well, she will make her way presently, and our little Constable will be hard for those to deal with who would raise strife. Aforetime he fought valiantly for a dream which most men would have forgotten ; but now the prize and the treasure are under his hand, and fierce he will be with whomsoever would lift his hand off from it."

They both wondered a little in their hearts.

"It may be nothing, when all is done," said John. "Yet I have my March riders, who love Palombris well ; and the men of the Blue Bull love him better, if better can be."

"But what they keep for her, she will make sure of," quoth the King : "for she is noble and wise, and tender of heart, and knoweth not that she is either this or that."

"That is a good word to say," said John.

"The best in the world, for a woman," answered the King, still smiling. Then he added : "No woman is herself, or can do all she was born to do, save and unless she has a faithful lover. For if she has not, she needs to bear his burden."

As they stood speaking, it seemed as if John had Palombris most in his mind ; but the King, Pallogris.

"What I had feared," said the King, "was that subtle hardship which twists things awry, and might force our little Constable into ways that none

of us meant : they might entrap him into that. But this I do not fear now." And presently he said : " We cannot prevent Giroflanz and his kinsfolk ; they must needs be with us at common days and times. But soon, my friend, I shall appoint a day for the marriage, when those twain may be wedded. And Palombris must deal with his foes ; we cannot."

But there were as yet few folk who knew any thing of what was betiding. Pallogris tied her hair in a golden net, and wore a gown of blue, and her long sleeves were lined with silk of white, and her shoes were blue. She was kind, and easy to please, and her little damoiseau loved her, and went with her whithersoever she would go.

As for the King, the more he regarded her, the more content he was ; and he smiled to himself, as one gifted with a foresight that is not given to all men.

CHAPTER VIII. OF THE BETROTHAL FEAST, AND THE ANGRY STRIFE THAT BEFELL AT IT

So upon a day, when all were assembled in high hall, the King let his cup be filled, and he rose up, from his chair before the board, and said :

" Messires, know that I have appointed a bridal and a bride for Palombris. I bid you all to the feast I shall give seven days hence. Fill your cups, messires, and drink to the bridegroom and the bride."

They drank, and the King looked on. But all who were present were so taken by surprise that it was not until afterwards that they began to consider. And then the news ran swiftly through the burgh ; yea, it ran over the land, and was spoken of in far distant places. Of this, Pallogris knew nought ; only that a day was now appointed. And some were truly joyful, although they wondered who the bride might be ; and some came to Palombris seeking to learn what they might ; and some frowned.

Now the days wore on, and Palombris and Pallogris were happy of heart in their garden, and the sun shone, and the moon waned and waxed over Barbizen ; but Palombris said : “ My playmate, I shall be glad when we may live alone in our tower, and out of Barbizen. It will be peace and joy there.”

Now the time came for the banquet, and that was the most glorious seen in Barbizen since long past times. Many candles shone in the great hall, and at the board sat the noblest men in all that land ; and Palombris at the King's right hand, and John at his left. Proud lords there were, and knights and esquires, and in the gallery the fair women of Barbizen. There were minstrels who played soft music ; and it was all a dream to Palombris as he sat there, smiling now and then, but seeing only the coloured richness of that hall, and the murmur and sound of the music, and the passing to and fro of esquires and pages. The

music pleased him, and the wine was of a five years' vintage, and he felt at peace, as one at the latter end of strenuous days. Also, the hall was somewhat warm.

But he saw the King stand up, in his long gown of white silk, edged with purple, hushing that great hall; and he heard not well the words the King spake, for his own thoughts ran too fast, although he heard the sound of the greeting, that was as thunder. Then he rose up beside the King, holding his cup in his hand; but the King still tarried on his feet, turning round a little. And they brought forth Pallogris, and she stood upon the daïs near by. There was a veil that hid her face, and the King lifted it, so that all might behold her. Palombris saw this, and feasted his eyes sweetly upon her countenance, while she stood with downcast eyes, colouring and paling a little by turns.

And then they applauded; he knew not who; but presently the King let the veil fall, and turned afresh. Palombris awaited until the sound should cease, before he began to speak; but he never spoke. For Giroflanz, who was standing a few paces away, amid his friends and kinsmen, tossed his cup again on the table, and said:

“She is ugly.”

If the King had ever been angry, he was angry then. His hand shook suddenly: for all men heard Giroflanz well enough. And indeed, many began to smile; all the folk of Giroflanz smiled, and some said to one another that it was true. The King knew not what to say; he only knew that he was

full of wrath. Then, also, many who heard were sorry, and some were angry, and all the room was full of quietude and confusion, no man knowing what should come.

Palombris saw only Giroflanz, as a hawk sees its quarry ; there seemed nothing else in the world, then, save only Giroflanz, and those scornful faces that smiled, and lips that whispered. He drew himself up, leaning across the board towards Giroflanz ; yea, he grew and towered above Giroflanz, as from a mountain top, and there was no man but saw him then, and him only ; they had no eyes but for him, as he had none but for Giroflanz. His lips curled back from his teeth with rage ; he stood and towered above Giroflanz while the King shook, and tried to set up his cup again, that had fallen over ; and they all sat aghast.

“ What was it I heard thee say, Giroflanz ? ” demanded Palombris, in a low and very clear voice.

“ I said that she is ugly,” said Giroflanz, too proud to falter with his own words, and eager for strife.

“ Thou liest, Giroflanz,” quoth Palombris.

“ Well, we have all seen her now,” answered Giroflanz, carelessly, “ and all men may judge.” And there befell a very strange silence, as though he had said something not easily questioned.

“ Giroflanz,” said Palombris, “ in thy teeth thou liest, and shalt eat thy lie.”

“ Some things are more easily fought about than answered,” said Giroflanz, rising up, while all his folk rose up about him, ready to guard him or draw him back.

"Messires," quoth the King ; but no one heeded him at all. Many clustered about Palombris, but most seemed to lean to Giroflanz, and some sat and smiled.

Then John rose up swiftly, and spoke in a voice like unto thunder : "Messires," he cried, "the King speaks. Silence, messires."

They obeyed, like so many lambs ; but Palombris and Giroflanz still eyed one another.

"Take Giroflanz away," quoth John.

He came, and linked his arm with the arm of Palombris, and drew him to a door. Giroflanz and his friends began to pass out through another door ; the stairways were thronged with men all speaking of what had befallen. Palombris shook John off in a little while, and sprang back into the chamber ; but Giroflanz was not there. John caught him again, and led him forth, until they stood upon the landing together.

Palombris said nought, but the flush faded slowly from his visage, and presently he summoned his folk around him, and began to descend the stairs. The two companies went down each its stairway in order ; but at the foot of the stairs, where they issued forth together through one door into the courtyard, fierce words were given and taken between the men of the Blue Bull and the kinsmen and friends of Giroflanz. Swords and poignards were drawn, and one of the Blue Bull was there stabbed and slain, and a great tumult broke forth.

Now this man was a march man, and half the Blue Bull were his kinsmen by blood or by marriage,

and now that he was slain, and lay on the ground amid a great pool of blood, they all took fire afresh, and what was bad enough was greatly worsened. Then one raised the aid cry of the march men, which they use when blood has been shed ; and they all rushed out into the street. The serjeants in the Constable's hostel heard the cry, and issued forth with weapons and torches, and the knights and esquires armed themselves and followed, and they fell on the kinsfolk of Giroflanz, and pursued them, and drove them to their house, and slew all that they could catch. Then other houses came to the help of that of Giroflanz, and were driven home likewise : and all the shops were shut, and all people ran for home, and the streets were closed, and strife ran abroad.

Palombris had returned to the hostel, and he was very grim. Straightway he bade his esquires arm him, and the bell was rung, and while they put his harness on, he gave out his commands. The great gates of the hostel were closed, but every window broke into light. Then came men riding and running swift as legs could carry them, and they seized the burgh gates, and wheeled in the war-engines, and rolled them along the streets. Those who had shut their doors heard a noise as of thunder ; and it came near, and passed by, and it was the rolling of wheels over the cobble-stones. They looked forth of their windows and saw the war engines go by. Then the people of Barbizen could see for themselves how the Blue Bull fought, and in what wise they set about their tasks, for they

had the engines along, and pushed them up against the doors of Giroflanz's house, ere most men could have walked round them twice.

And this while the King sat alone in his seat in the feast hall, toying with his overturned cup, a very sad and downcast old man.

CHAPTER IX. OF THE WRATH OF PALOMBRIS

BUT ere they drew bolt or brought the great petraria to bear on the doors of Giroflanz's house, John of the Marches had run across the bridge to the Constable's hostel. He found Palombris armed, and his helm was already laid on the table.

"Palombris," he said, "hear me speak ere ye do aught at all. Stay thy commands while I say what I have to say."

Palombris answered him nothing.

"Constable," said John, "ye have been as a son to me, and the very joy of my heart ; I taught you war and governance, and did not refrain from opening ways for your advancement. Give me this boon, then, if I must needs pray for it."

"Ye heard what he said," answered Palombris.

"Constable," quoth John, "I pray you by your love and your hope to hear me ere ye do aught. Harken for a little space."

Palombris shook his head, and made no stay.

"Constable," said John, "think not that I desire to hinder any lawful vengeance ye may take, but I pray you by all I have done, and ye have done, to

stay but the half of an hour. I have seen the face of Pallogris, although I have not spoken with her ; and I know well what she would have me say."

"Let them hold their hands till I send word," said Palombris ; and one of his esquires ran upon a balcony, and cried to those below. Then said Palombris : "Say what ye will say, John, if say it ye will."

So John said : "Had Viane been the cause of this strife, she would have rejoiced in her heart, and been passing glad. If for her Barbizen had been a city divided against itself, and if swords had been drawn, and blood had flowed, and men had looked fiercely on one another for her sake, a great and unforgettable sweetness had that been to her. But no one hath done these things for her ; in her stead, many do it for Pallogris, who liketh it not, and dreadeth it, and suffereth in heart because of it."

"Never can I face Pallogris again until I have made myself clean with vengeance," said Palombris.

"Let it be vengeance on the right man," said John. "If ye can attain it by the blood of all and sundry, ye may slay me here and now, and be content."

"Ye heard what he said," answered Palombris.

Then he sat down, and put his head upon the table, and wept ; but it was not with weakness.

John laid a hand on his shoulder. There was nought he could find to say, or to think of, but he was most unhappy ; and this the more, for that he himself thought as Palombris did, and deemed him chiefly in the right.

“Constable,” he said, “I desire to point to you the right man for your vengeance, that ye wreak it not on your friends; for on me, and on the King your friend, it threateneth to fall this night. I pray you consider this, and do not make us pay this penalty.”

Palombris answered nothing.

“Think ye,” said John, “that ye will please the demoiselle Pallogris in this manner? I tell you, nay; it will never be pleasing to her that Barbizen ran with blood for her, and that so heavy a deed fell on the heads of those who love her. Now, I will counsel you this much, that ye wait, and if then I cannot make good my promise that I give you, to bring you and Giroflanz together in combat, I will say no more, but rather will help you.”

“There is a quicker way,” said Palombris.

“Thou wilt not raise rebellion against the King, Palombris?” demanded John.

“I am not doing so,” answered Palombris. “I am but pursuing a private matter of quarrel, which is the right of every gentleman.”

“But,” quoth John, “seest thou not that it is different as for thyself? It is no other than this right of private feud that we have fought against and striven to subdue. Now, if thou takest thereto, surely all our strife has been in vain, and we are undone.”

Palombris fell into thought, for he saw this.

“There is this also,” quoth John. “Thou hast been entrapped. Thou wert sitting at the table, as one in a pleasant dream, forgetting all save love,

and deeming all things drawing to a quiet and happy end; and then came this, all suddenly, taking thee unawares, and thou wert caught in a trap. Truly, it is no small thing for that feather-head, Giroflanz, that out of all the mighty men of war and counsel in the realm, he was the first to catch the Constable napping. Thou wilt presently see this thyself."

Palombris studied a long while in his mind. Then he rose up and cast his arms about John's neck.

"Dear sir," said he, "I thank you for all ye have said. I will at least promise to make no stir until an hour after midnight; and in the mean time, do ye as ye will. But keep this counsel secret. I must debate it with myself."

John kissed him, and left him, and ran as fast as he might to the house of Giroflanz's kinsfolk. The engines lay before the doors, and the serjeants waited beside them. In every place, both in the great square and in the court of the Constable's hostel, stood long lines of mailed men, standing beside their horses. The sky was clear, and many stars sparkled, and burning cressets cast red light on the mailed men, who neither moved nor spoke, but waited; and the only sound was the champing of the horses.

But as John passed by, the marshal of the Blue Bull was walking to and fro before the gates, speaking to his companions.

"Messires," said he, "and ye gentle striplings, our esquires and pages, ever remember that the

Constable's demoiselle is the most beautiful in the world ; and if any saith to the contrary, ye shall at once take notice thereof, though ye be but one to twenty. And if any man in this company draweth back, or is slow, or holdeth silence in the face of the enemy, verily I will cast him forth, and strike his name out of our roll. Moreover, if any should in your presence wink an eyelash, or should seem to smile, ye are to take notice forthwith. But in all places, and at all times, ye are boldly to assert that the Constable's demoiselle far exceedeth all others ; the which it is our duty to make passing clear to the slow understandings of those who dwell in Barbizen."

And then he began to say what he would do to those who were backward ; and since he was a man of great lineage, who never stayed his tongue, but said the first thing that came into his head, therefore what he said was most marvellous, and not to be uttered again.

Palombris walked to and fro as the night wore. A mighty wrestle it was that he went through then ; for at one moment nothing seemed to weigh in the balance against vengeance on the whole house of Giroflanz, and all the burgh of Barbizen, and the world beside ; and at another, it seemed as John had said, that to follow the feud would be to cast aside all he had done for the realm. Palombris was torn and angry at being so caught.

So he walked to and fro in his chamber, while the Blue Bull waited. He was not able as then to say what he would do ; but he knew well that he could

not go to Pallogris without some thing having been done, lest she ask him what he had done, and he should need to answer: "As yet I have done nothing."

He knew that she waited for him, and longed for his coming; and he knew that her heart failed her, because he came not, and that she was sad to death. None the more could he go, and say that he had done nothing; and this stung him into fresh wrath, so that every time he calmed, and let anger fall from him, his wrath flamed afresh to think that she waited. And it seemed to him nothing worth that he had conquered the marches, and gathered fame, and hanged Anguis of Anguiscart, if this thing should come upon him; rather would he have stayed a plain esquire, or seen Barbizen perish, or gone thence to dwell in a new land, even though he built his house with his own hands: yea, there was nought but it seemed better than bearing this. Yet it was done, and all he might bring about could never undo it again.

And all this time the men of the Blue Bull stood to arms, the knights and esquires fully armed beside their horses, and the serjeants ready and watchful. Palombris had but to give the word, and they would have stormed the quarter, and slain all who were therein. But he did not give it, only he walked to and fro.

CHAPTER X. HOW PALLOGRIS AND THE KING COMFORTED ONE ANOTHER

AFTER the King had sat a long while, he rose up from the board, and drifted away towards his own private chamber. The candles yet blazed in the hall, but all other men had left it save a few pages and esquires who stood by the side boards and watched the King. But as he went, it came into his mind that this while Pallogris had been left un-comforted and alone, and no one had gone near her to speak any word. He called Aloys, and sent him forthwith, and himself followed slowly, with a damoiseau who bore two tall candles before him.

Pallogris sat in a chair in a dark room. When the King came thither, she regarded him intently, for he looked marvellously young in the light of the damoiseau's candles.

"Why art thou regarding me so?" he asked, sweetly.

She answered: "I supposed that I had fallen asleep, and begun to dream; for it was a young man that I saw come towards me. It may be that I have a gift that way."

The King looked at her in his turn; whereas her little damoiseau had fallen asleep at her feet, resting his head on her knee. She was a little pale, but in all ways well composed.

"What gift would that be?" he asked.

She said: "To see people, at diverse times, with all their age sloughed from them, so that they appear young, as once they were, and again will be."

“That would be a strange gift,” he said. “I do not know what it would mean.”

She answered : “It is that part of them which may never perish, but continues, though hidden by the signs of age, till it is set free again.”

He gazed at her earnestly, and said : “What kind of man did I appear to be ?”

“Slender and finely shaped,” she answered, “with very fair features, yet gentle and sweet, as one who is not over sure of his ways in the world.”

“I thank God if my youth still remains in me,” he said. Then he added, musingly : “I came to speak cheerful and happy words : but now that I am here, I am as one who comes rather to receive them. For as thou sawest me, so I was, and so I am,—a man not over sure of his ways in the world. How is it with thee ?”

“It may be that I too am not over sure,” she said, smiling.

“There is always the Constable,” said the King, “who is like to a rail on a steep stair, or to a bridge over a gulf. As for me, I am utterly cast down and shamed ; neither am I able to say all that I would say.”

She answered : “What hast thou to be ashamed of, messire ?”

“All that I do goes wrong,” he said, “no matter how wisely it may be planned.”

“Dear sir,” said Pallogris, “to me ye have shown only kindness, and given only happiness.”

“Yea,” said he, “but see what cometh of my devices, that I am shamed and vexed by the ex-

ceeding evil and wickedness of those who should obey me. Or at least," he said, "they should respect our royalty. But it is ever so, that all I do turneth out not as I wished, but is made to bear ill fruit."

"Dear sir," said Pallogris, "perchance ye look not far enough ahead. I think the gate of all ways is a pinch to get through. It is a pinch to get born, and a pinch to die and reach heaven ; it is a pinch to the solace of love, and a pinch to the joy of children. Indeed, it is a pinch to all good things, and if we turned back at the nip of it, little pleasure should we ever have."

He was pleased, and she came and put her arms round his neck, and laid her cheek beside his ; and he stroked her cheek with a finger, idly, and was much comforted.

"Perchance thou art right," said he, "and I am but a weak and foolish old man, complaining because I cannot wait long enough for matters to come to their right ending. It is a solace to think so ; and that is a strange thing withal."

"Why so ?" asked Pallogris.

"Forsooth," he answered, "that it should ever be a hopeful thing that we may be fools. Never have I heard a stranger cause of comfort."

"It often falleth out," said Pallogris, "that if we are wise, then it must be true that life is not happy or good ; but if we are foolish and blind, it may be that the good and happiness are there, and we perceive them not. So we desire that it may be that we are fools, for then are things better than we feared."

“Thou art right,” quoth the King. “I would fain have told that to my cousin the archbishop, who was a great man for gathering sayings together into a book. But where didst thou learn this wisdom?”

She told him of Heron of Wood-Isle, and all his sayings and deeds; and to the King this was a right marvellous tale, and he said:

“Were I younger, I would go to him, and hear him speak: I would put on old garments, and appear a simple person. But I would not let him come to the burgh, for there he would be praised, and made much of, and the spirit of wisdom would leave him. Wisdom dwells in the woods and fields, and hateth walled towns.”

Then they fell to talking of all manner of things akin to this, so that at one time the King was telling Pallogris his secret thoughts on matters religious, and at another he was saying how that he had ever loved oysters with sauce, and also oysters baked in a pie, and he had noted that the Constable, who was the most sparing of men, shared this taste; and he said how often it was that kinsfolk discovered the same tastes. Then he counselled her that Palombris should sometimes be given oysters. And they were very happy in this conversation.

But when they had spoken of Palombris some while, the King turned his speech upon the feast, and asked Pallogris how her mind went, concerning it.

She said: “I am only sad for this, that men should strive over a thing of little worth.”

"Nay," said he, "I will not grant that it was a little thing. It was an exceeding great thing, and deserved to be taken notice of."

"To me it seemeth small," she answered.

He studied her.

"Thou knowest, I think," said he, "that what may call for little note on thy part may call for much on the part of the Constable; or how should he uphold thine honour?"

"What will come of it?" she asked. "And where is he?"

"I know not what they are doing," quoth the King. "But John hath gone to make peace. And time passes, and no message comes, nor any noise of war; so I deem his errand speedeth somewhat."

"I would that Palombris came to me," she said.

"He will surely come anon," he answered. "Art thou of a steady mind concerning it?"

"I deem that my mind is steady," she said.

When the King at last rose to depart, he paused, and said: "It hath come to pass as I feared. I came to comfort thee; but lo, instead of that, thou hast comforted me. I am an unprofitable servant."

Pallogris answered: "It often chances that the best way whereby to comfort a woman is to give her some one to comfort."

The King considered in his mind; then he said:

"I should desire to be a little more profitable, none the less."

Pallogris smiled, but did not answer.

"Ha," he said, "I see that thou hast an answer, but sayest it not, lest words be stopped in me."

“ Truly,” quoth Pallogris, “ it was so.”

“ Well, what wert thou deeming ? ” he asked.

“ Only this,” she said ; “ I deemed that nothing was more profitable than to be worthy of love.”

“ As thou art,” answered the King. And he went away, saying to himself : “ If the Constable faileth her, surely I will take her myself, though I flee the realm therefor.”

So he returned towards his chamber, the damoiseau still bearing before him the two long candles, that by now were burning down somewhat. But as he passed the stairs that led to the bridge over into the Constable’s hostel, he heard a man springing down the steps, and there was Palombris.

“ Little Constable,” said he, “ how dost thou fare now ? ”

“ Passing well,” said Palombris. “ No else than as thou wouldst desire, things being as they are.”

Palombris seemed glad and active, and smiled with a clear eye and ruddy cheeks. There was no fret or fever in him.

“ What hath come to pass ? ” quoth the King.

“ John shall relate that tale,” answered Palombris. “ But as at this present, there is quiet in the burgh.” And he came near and stretched forth his arms, and said : “ Dear sir, if I have seemed to neglect thee, and set thee at nought, I pray thy pardon.”

“ I have felt somewhat set at nought,” quoth the King ; “ but, after all, I could have looked for little

else. And he would be a hard man who would find fault with thee, little Constable."

Palombris kissed his hand, and answered : " I love thee well, my King."

So the King was content.

" And now," he said, " seek out thy demoiselle for a while, and speak to her."

With that, Palombris fled away into the dark.

CHAPTER XI. HOW PALOMBRIS FOUND PALLOGRIS IN THE GARDEN, AND HOW ANDREAS FOUND THEM ASLEEP TOGETHER

BUT Pallogris was not to be found that night, and Palombris went away to his room, which was kept ready for him. He stood before his window, looking upon the moonlit pleasaunce ; and of all things one only lay heavy upon his heart, and this was, that in the morning he had not gone into the pleasaunce to meet Pallogris, nor yet in the evening had he gone to her. But when he had thought of this, and sorrowed over it, he went to the bed, and lay down, with Kol's sword clasped to him ; and the moonlight was clear in the pleasaunces, and the fragrance of the night air crept into the chamber. He said in his heart : " All is well : and what is less good than it might be, may presently be amended,"—and therewith he slept.

He had not slept long when he awoke again, and lay thinking of Pallogris. He held her hands, and spoke to her softly, praying her pardon : and then

he could not sleep, but rose up, putting on a long gown against the night air, and he sat by the window, not overcome by any weariness for which no sleep would come, but awake as a man is in the day time. And still he thought of Pallogris, and wondered where she was, and if she slept.

Yet it seemed to him that he was more awake than in the day time, and as if some things which sleep in the day were now awake ; for he sat gazing into a little pane of glass, where the moonlight made glowing fires of blue and silver ; and he thought that the blue was the sky, and the silver was the sea, and he thought that he could smell each flower in the garden, and hear each sound throughout the great palace, so clear had all things become to him, as in dreams.

Then he heard a sound that was less a sound than a presence, for Palombris had ears sharper than a hind's ; and he sat watching for it and listening. And in a little while he arose again, and opened his door, and there stood ; and when he had been there a short space, he knew that some one was opening a door. Straightway he stepped softly down some steps that were before him, and laid a hand across the shoulders of whomsoever that might be. It was a woman. "Tell me," he said, "who thou art : " and even as he said this, he knew who it was, for it was Pallogris.

He put his hand to the great key, and turned it, and pulled the door open. All the moonlight entered, and the pleasaunce lay before him : there was but one step over the threshold. He saw that

Pallogris was arrayed in the clothes she had worn in Greenwood, and bore a little bundle in her hand. She cowered away from him, with eyes frightened ; and he closed that door again, leaving them in the dark.

“ My playmate,” he said, softly, drawing her to him. “ I pray thee forgive me if I seemed to forget even for one day : wilt thou not forgive me for this ? ”

She answered : “ I grieve that thou hast caught me. O, I pray thee let me go.”

He did not let her go, but said : “ Yea, but first of this. I could not sleep because of it, lest thou shouldst be sad. But I was angry, and might not depart away unto thee at that time.”

“ O, freely thou art forgiven,” she answered : “ I will forgive thee all thou mayst do : it is I who need forgiveness.”

“ What art thou doing ? ” he asked ; and in the darkness Pallogris felt that she could never escape from him, for he held her as closely as the darkness did. She said nothing ; but they held silence a while, and then he opened the door, took her up, and carried her in his arms through the dark pleasaunce until he reached the pavilion. He laid her upon the seat and himself sat beside, and clasped his arms about her.

“ Now thou shalt tell me,” he said, “ all that is in thine heart, Pallogris. I pray thee speak to me.”

She said : “ O, thou knowest all, I think. It has been a mistake ; I did wrong to come with thee,”—and she hid her face and wept.

Palombris waited, stroking her cheek gently with his hand : and presently he said : “ My playmate, I love thee : surely thou shalt never go from Barbizen while I have horses to follow thee, and men wise in woodcraft, and sleuth hounds of keen scent. Thou little one,—didst thou think it so easy to leave Barbizen ? ”

She answered : “ I was unwise : for I know that it is true : I am ugly.”

He said softly : “ If Giroflanz escapeth with his life, he will be the luckiest of men.”

Pallogris ceased weeping, and lay quietly a while : and then she began to say again : “ I knew that it would be so, for it is true that I am not beautiful, and I am no fit mate for thee, and I fear, and I fear. Let me go away out of Barbizen, and thou shalt wed some one whom men shall praise. I pray thee not to keep me, for I cannot live knowing that men think so of me and of thee : and all their days they will laugh.”

So he laid his hand again upon her, steady and calm and comforting as the moon-beams.

“ Dost thou love me, little playmate ? ” he asked.

She said : “ How could I not, when thou art my life : what else have I besides love ? ”

“ Then thou shalt not go,” said he.

“ But,” she said, “ I must go, for I know that it is true, and they know it, and thou wilt know it, and love me no longer. Better it would have been, that I had stayed in Greenwood, remembering love, and never deceiving my heart with dreams.”

He comforted her, and said : “ Surely thou shalt

not go away from me. But tell me that thou lovest me."

"I love thee," she said, simply : and for a space they were silent again, but not unhappy.

"Thou shalt not go away from me, little playmate," said Palombris. "And thou shalt not fear ; for thou art the desire of my heart, and none other but thee will I ever have, nor will I let thee go from me. And thou shalt weep if thou wilt," he whispered, "but thou shalt not go away."

She whispered low : "I am ugly."

He whispered again : "Thou art not."

She whispered : "All men say so, and all men laugh at me ; and it is true, and all our days men will laugh at thee also because of this."

He said : "Nay, my playmate, thou knowest not, for when to-morrow's evening comes, no man in this land will laugh at thee, nor at me. Few are laughing now."

She said again : "I pray thee let me go : for I cannot bear to be less to thee than I ought. I will not be a harm to thee."

"To-morrow," he said, "thou shalt see Giroflanz fall into the dust and cease laughing : for he lies, and he knows that he lies, and well enough he knoweth that. He did it because he hates us."

She sighed and said : "Yet I fear. What shall I do if they bring thee back to me ? Better if I go away."

"Nay," he answered softly, "thou dreamest, Pallogris. Giroflanz is not such a man of his hands as I am, nor so expert."

"Thou art but a little boy," she said.

Palombris drew his arm from the sleeve of his gown, and placed her hand upon it. Hard it was, and smooth and round, and thick like a lion's : no women knew how strong those arms were.

"Thou shalt escape mine arms no more easily than Giroflanz," said Palombris. "They are strong. Kol gave them to me : he and his princess. My playmate, thou shalt not fear for me. I will keep thee, and none shall part us : thou shalt never go away from me, until thou lovest me no more."

"Then that will be never," she said. "I love thee always."

"Thou shalt rest with me," he said. "I have fought strong men, and beaten down great ones : and Giroflanz is a valiant man, but a man to be led by others, and not as I am. I made him what he is, and from me his strength came. Without me he is nought, but is as a child."

Pallogris could see Palombris in the dimness. She opened her eyes, for she was at peace now, to see who spoke these proud words : but it was the round face and kind eyes of her playmate that she saw. He lay easily with his head near hers, undisturbed : and suddenly she drew nearer to him, and put her arms about him, saying : "O, I believe thee. Thou art strong : thou shalt say what is good to be done."

"And thou wilt not depart from me ?" he said.

"Nay, O, nay," said she. Then again : "Would it have been sad for thee ?"

He answered : "What would I have done, in a

pleasaunce empty, when the sun was gone ? And I should walk to and fro, and have no playmate, because she had left me, and there would be no joy any more."

Pallogris' tears started again, and she said : " I cannot think it would grieve thee as much as that. I am not so dear to thee as thou art to me."

" Now," said he, " thou art to learn this : that love is equal between us, and all I am to thee, thou art to me. For I did not journey forth of Greenwood to conquer a realm, and I shall not wed thee to strengthen it ; but I fought and journeyed to make nearer the day when we might dwell together, and I conquered a realm to strengthen that day. So it is, that I will stake that conquest as a man stakes money on the throw of dice ; I give it to thee as a fair necklace ; it shall be thy chief jewel, and thy wedding gift from me ; but I will give thee a better gift, Pallogris, than a realm, namely, the man who won it. And thou shalt give me a better gift still, and that is the lure that led me. So go not away."

Then he spread out his arms, and said : " Glad am I to be the man I am ; I rejoyce at the day I was born and the hand that made me. And whether comes life or death, wealth or unwealth, I shall say no otherwise, for I have my heart's desire, to delight in for ever."

And presently she asked forgiveness timidly, and grew sad lest she had been cruel : and then he comforted her, and they were both very content, and fell asleep in the midst of their whispering. And when Andreas, seeking in the dawning-tide for

the Constable, entered the pavilion, he beheld them there, sleeping like two children, with their heads close together. So Andreas bethought him, and regarded them steadfastly awhile, and then withdrew, and never said ought to any living man ; but he was not displeased, and kept that door steadily till morning came.

CHAPTER XII. OF THE BATTLE BETWEEN PALOMBRIS AND GIROFLANZ

TOWARDS the middle of the morning the old King set his hand upon the shoulder of his damoiseau, and entered into the pleasaunce, until he came to that place where Pallogris was used to sit. The sun shone in the gardens, and the air was dry and balmy ; never was a sun more glorious or more golden than that. Pallogris sat in her little arbour, meditating, well content, yet meek that morning.

The King greeted her courteously, and sat by her, watching her with his blue, unobservant eyes.

“Thou art well-content, Pallogris,” said he, “and so am I : and so, I think, is thy little lordling.”

“I am not ill-content,” answered Pallogris, softly ; and her damoiseau looked up at them with large eyes.

“Wilt thou be a good lover when thou growest up, little lord ? ” quoth the King.

“I trust to be so,” answered the damoiseau, gravely.

“It is part of the training of a gentleman,” said

the King, no less gravely. "Thou shalt watch Palombris, and do as he doth."

Pallogris smiled at this. Then the King pointed with his little walking stick to a bush of fair roses, all white with hearts of gold.

"I see three very fair roses," quoth he. "I pray you gather them, damoiseau."

When the roses were gathered, they shared them one to each, and the King said: "Now, if you will, let us walk a little way; for there is somewhat to be seen not far hence. Thou hast never yet seen the like, Pallogris; but be not adread thereof, nor in any way disturbed. I promise thee a fair ending."

So they rose up, and passed along many paths slowly, sometimes tarrying to look at the flowers; for the King discoursed in his leisurely fashion, and every fair thing he pointed out with his stick. In time they came to where a path led through a postern in the wall. The King drew out a key, and unlocked the door; and when they had gone through the gate, they were in a new and strange world. They stood in a path that led along a mound or grassy escarpment; the grey ancient wall of the pleasaunces bounded it, and the spires and turrets of the King's house towered above the trees, and the vanes sparkled against the blue sky. Before them lay a mighty field, all green and bright; it lay below them, and was bounded by a mound on all sides, and on most days it lay clear and green and empty, bordered by elms and beech trees and woods that stood dark beyond. But now there were rich pavilions pitched on the field, and high

scaffoldings hung with cloths and tapestries ; and barriers were built of new wood, and a great concourse of folk thronged there.

The King said : “ We will visit this gathering of folk : and thou, Pallogris, shalt hold mine arm, lest thou be lost.”

Pallogris deemed this not unlikely, nor thought of any other reason ; only she wondered at the colours of the pavilions, and the numbers of the folk. Now they went down together, slowly along paths, until they came to the scaffoldings : and many great men were there, standing in twos and threes. They made deep obeisances to the King, and he bowed to them, and Pallogris half closed her eyes, and trembled a little, but kept her hand within his arm. And presently she found that they were seated together on soft cushions, whence they looked over the field from on high. The damoiseaus sat before them.

So as they sat there, with many steps, that were also seats, running down to the greensward, it was all a dreamy mingling of colours to Pallogris ; till she saw before a barrier a great pavilion, and thence issued a man arrayed like a king in blue and gold. His hauberk fell nigh to his ankles, and thereover was a surcoat blazoned with arms. He stood there pulling on gloves of leather and steel, and she knew that for Palombris.

She saw many people about them now, both men and women, in glorious attire ; but she turned not her head, but saw only Palombris, and forgot them in watching him : and there remained a space

around the King and her, into which none intruded. At last came a great company riding, with John of the Marches mailed, and many other men richly arrayed ; and they came off their horses, and thronged up, and John approached the King.

“Messire,” quoth he, “I present to thee this bâton.”

“It is our will that thou keepest it, messire,” quoth the King. Then John sat beside them, and he was the marshal of the lists. They stayed there a while, and the King pointed with his stick, and questioned the damoiseaus respecting the arms displayed on the field, and conversed with them on these matters. So it befell a space, until Pallogris suddenly knew that the field was clear and empty, and all folk sat at the barriers and scaffoldings, so great a throng that none might number them. But at the ends of the field, beside the barriers, gathered the common people, a great many. And John had risen up, and stood alone bearing his bâton. He bade the kings of arms call silence, and when all was still, and the trumps had ceased, his voice rang loud.

“Messires,” quoth he, “I will not rehearse this matter, nor repeat words that once spoken are ill to speak again. This combat is at the King’s will : let all men obey the King.”

Now came heralds signalling : and the marshals rode to and fro to keep the lists ; the colour was as a garden of flowers bending in the wind. A great destrier was led towards Palombris, and he mounted, and took a spear, and so sat waiting.

And when all was ready, he rode slowly forth towards a pavilion, and touched the shield of Giroflanz with his spear point, and rode slowly back, and there sat still. Then Giroflanz made himself ready, and sat likewise upon his milk-white destrier, very fair to see. Pallogris saw him, and wondered and waited : there was a little time of silence and waiting as Palombris and Giroflanz listened to hear the trumpet. John turned to see the King ; then lowered his bâton, and sat again in his seat, and Pallogris looked upon the field.

The trumpet breathed a great flourish sweetly, and Palombris and Giroflanz drew together, feutring their spears. Giroflanz raised his a little, as though towards the visor of Palombris' helm ; but Palombris struck surely in the midst of the blazoned armoury of Giroflanz, and Giroflanz toppled, and his destrier reeled, and Giroflanz began to fall, and fell upon the ground, and fell over, and again over, as though he would never cease, and all his array was full of dust, and he lay there on the grass. It seemed a long time to Pallogris as she watched, but presently Palombris threw his leg over the saddle, and stood upon the greensward ; and then something lit upon his hand like a star from heaven, and flickered and flashed, and gave forth dazzling light, and he was running swiftly, bearing Kol's sword in his grip.

Giroflanz spread out his arms, and drew in his legs, and strove to rise up, but could not ; and therewith Palombris trod him down, and put the

sword to his eye-piece. None could hear, but many might guess what was said ; yet Giroflanz fell back quite flat on the grass, upon his back. Pallogris began to be aware of a sound ; she remembered the thunder that in summer rolled among the swaying trees of Greenwood, and the wind that roared and sighed ; for now all men were on their feet, and some were showing one another what had been done ; but she understood not at all, save only that Giroflanz was cast down. She knew not what that stroke had been. But John also was on his feet, and threw up his bâton.

Palombris saw the kings of arms running towards him, and he saw the people.

“Thou art called off, messire,” quoth the elder herald, raising his wand. “We pray thee cease.”

It seemed as if Palombris would smite down the herald, but he left this and came presently to the side of the lists, whence he looked up at the many folk.

“John,” he cried, “thou doest not well. Thou hast stayed this combat unjustly.”

“Nay, messire,” answered John. “I desire that all men shall know the King’s will in this matter, which is that Giroflanz shall not be slain. Thou hast the victory, plain to see : be content.”

“John,” quoth Palombris, “I am not content.” Then others began to speak, and a fierce wrangle broke forth between Palombris and some of his chief foes. Pallogris could not hear all that was spoken, but she wist well that bitter things were being said, and they were not all on one side. Then

Palombris began wrathfully to point out and to name men out of those who cried against him. "Thou," he said, "and thou; if ye think that I am to be cried down in this manner, who fought for this realm when ye were neither able nor willing, I bid you come forth and settle whether ye are able to uphold yourselves or no."

One rose up and demanded: "All of us, little Constable?"

Palombris answered: "There are no ten men of you but I am as good a man as they, for I remember how ye left your friends and fled away from before me at Anguiscart." He had not spoken these words ere they had risen up with eager enmity, and came issuing forth to arm themselves. It was in vain then that the King and John strove to allay this fresh quarrel; none heeded them, and they were lost in the turmoil. For already the chosen ten were arming, and some of the lords urged them on for malice, and some for merriment, and if any were wiser, they were silent, or helpless, and knew not what to do.

"I cannot stay them, messire," quoth John.

The King turned in his seat, but forthwith he felt Pallogris, whose hand lay within his arm; and he saw her, who did not comprehend. Then suddenly it was as if he had told her his trouble, and she had answered wisely and well, counselling him what he should do; and he saw that counsel to be good.

"Demoiselle," he said, sweetly, "wilt thou do a little thing for Palombris?"

"I will do whatsoever pleaseth him," said she.

"Rise up swiftly," said he, "and walk proudly down these steps, and along the gallery, until thou comest to that barrier of new wood that is yellow and fresh. Pass then before it, and knock at the little postern, and speak such words as these that I tell thee." She listened to his words, and remembered them well. He said also: "If thou wouldst not see Palombris dead, do this."

Palombris had taken his stand in the field; Pallogris perceived him, and with a steady heart swept her dress about her, and descended the steps between the lords and the ladies. They saw her, and wondered and gazed; but still she went on, and turned along the gallery, seen of all folk. So came she to the edge of the barrier and stood; there was none who came to assist her, so in a little while she leaped down of herself upon the greensward, and many of those who saw her do it thought she did it marvellously well, for Pallogris came out of Greenwood, where women were lithe and strong, and well shaped. Now all the common people stood ranged on her right hand, and all their eyes were upon her, fierce and dark. There stood big and roughly dressed men, and also brown shaven men who seemed to be merchants and traffickers, and they were much crowded together.

They knew her, and they knew whither she went, which the lords had not understood.

So they cried out: "Get the Constable away, if thou canst, or harm will come of it. One man cannot fight ten."

Pallogris passed them by, and averted her face, and doing this saw Palombris on foot, running with Kol's sword ; and as he ran, he smote, and a man fell. Therewith came a mighty roar from the barrier, that made the heart of Pallogris to stop ; then swiftly she recovered her courage. And a man who had the guise of a merchant leant over and cried after Pallogris, so that she heard him, saying :

“ He is as much ours as thine : for it will not go well with us if we lose the one man who is able to rule in Barbizen.”

Pallogris heard nothing more as she passed, for now she came to the postern of new wood, all yellow, and of rough planks. She knocked thereon, and men came, and opened it. Most were watching ; but some saw her, and came, and she said :

“ I pray you show me Andreas.”

They led her to a place where stood two men watching ; one had steel grey hair and thin hard lips, and one was broad and ruddy, but both were gloriously clad in long coats of mail, and the blue bull ramped over their coloured armoury. They looked mighty men.

“ Andreas,” said Pallogris, “ art thou the King's servant ? ”

He knew her, though she knew not him : and he answered : “ I am the King's servant.”

She said : “ These words the King saith to you : arm and mount, and enter into the lists, and part those who are there ; and first go to the King, and make obeisance to him.”

"We will go at the King's word," said the marshal; "but we will run for thine."

"Then run," she answered.

Andreas struck his hands together, and cried out:

"Ho, ye of the Blue Bull; to horse, messires."

Pallogris knew not whither to go: she stood trembling before the barrier: and as he ran, Palombris left a trail of his foes behind him, but was stricken.

CHAPTER XIII. HOW ANDREAS CAME TO THE KING AND PLACED IN HIS HANDS THE COMPANY OF THE BLUE BULL

Now as all folk watched the battle in the lists, they heard the trumpets of the Blue Bull blow up and flourish, and they turned their heads towards the barriers, and many stood up to see. The battle stopped not; for of the ten, three now lay upon the ground, so sorely hurt by Kol's sword, that they might not move, and their esquires were coming to them. And two more there were, no longer eager to come to grips, but standing away and following at a distance. Of the five that were left, two never came very close to Palombris, choosing rather to wait and watch, but the other three pressed hard upon him, and dealt grim strokes. He still ran about swiftly; but the King deemed that those three and the two who waited would prevail over him in the end.

So as this befell, the company of the Blue Bull

began to cast open the barriers, and the pages let go the heads of the destriers, that they might issue out. There was a throng of gaily clad youths about the barriers, and amid them stood Pallogris, with her back safely against the strong new wood. Those who turned at hearing the trumpets beheld Andreas moving forth on a milk-white horse, with all his mail of war upon him. Behind him came two lines of men, one on each side of the lists, and the marshal rode alone between them; and on every man's breast was the Blue Bull sewn over his own armoury. Slowly they issued out, and passed along the lists, the tall horses champing and curvetting, but Andreas came to the King, and stayed his horse there, and sprang to the earth. Then he lifted his visor, and advanced to the scaffolding, and came before the King who sat there.

"Messire," said he, bending his knee, "ye have asked for the Blue Bull, and commanded me hither. I demand to know your will."

"Andreas," quoth the King, "art thou a faithful servant and vavasour of us who rule this realm of Barbizen?"

"Messire," quoth Andreas, "I desire you to know that I will do your will in all matters; for I trust that ye will command me to do nothing against mine honour."

"Andreas," quoth the King, "I have desired that this combat should cease, but those who are here seem to heed me not." There was a great silence as he said these words, and very clearly his voice sounded. "We bid thee, Andreas," said he,

“to stay this combat, for which we shall be thy warranty.”

CHAPTER XIV. OF THE STAYING OF THE BATTLE, AND THE ARRESTMENT OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT IN IT

Now forthwith Andreas returned down the steps of the scaffolding ; a very mighty man he seemed amid the richly clad lords and ladies who sat thereon. He lifted his hand, and bade the combat cease in the name of the King ; and then all watched what should next befall. The strife ceased a while, and some of the esquires came near the knights, and some still hung back around the pavilions. So began some dispute ; and one or two of the knights began to defy Andreas, and to fall on afresh.

“Messires,” quoth Andreas, “I arrest you.” And he named them by their names, and pointed to them with his finger. So the men of the Blue Bull took them, and received them into custody. There was no struggling against that. Then the third said :

“Of thee, Andreas, I have no obedience.”

“I arrest thee also, messire,” quoth he, “whether thou likest it or not.” And this also was done.

Then the King spoke, and said : “Messires,” quoth he, “deliver up your swords to my steward, and he shall render them to me.” So John of the Marches took the swords, and laid them before the King.

Then Palombris said : “I am not well treated ;

for this is the second time that I have been robbed of honour."

"Messire," quoth Andreas, touching his shoulder, "thee also I arrest. Deliver thy sword into the King's hand."

Palombris began to laugh at this, and presently he had his helm unlaced, and his brow sponged; and he went and delivered his sword to the King.

"It is Kol's sword, that I brought from Greenwood," he said. The King began to think of Kol.

In this manner Andreas stayed the combat, and took all those who fought in it; for he bade all others likewise to render up their swords and come into custody; nor did he except Giroflanz, and those who had been sorely hurt, until he received warranties for them. And so the King won that bout, and no man was able to defy him, for none there was able to meet the company of the Blue Bull.

CHAPTER XV. HOW THE KING DEALT OUT JUDGMENT; AND OF WHAT HE DOOMED TO GIROFLANZ, AND WHAT TO VIANE, AND WHAT TO PALOMBRIS AND PALLOGRIS

ALL the men watched the King, where he sat with John beside him, standing at his elbow. He bade all to be brought before him, and beheld them stand there, with all that concourse of folk around.

"Messires," said he, "for over long now it has bruited abroad that Barbizen is a proud

burgh, and the King gentle to all his servants. This is no bad repute for a city or for a King. None the less, we are minded now to require that ye remember us to be the King, and that our ordinances must be obeyed. Therefore, messires, I shall judge you with that intent." John stood silent, and the King named that lord who had been eagerest in the fray, both with his tongue and with his sword, and said :

"Thee, messire, we are displeased with. We command thee to depart from Barbizen, and return not until our pleasure be known ; for which we shall presently demand of thee surety. Until then thou art in our custody, and may not leave it. See thou to this, Andreas."

All people were surprised at this ; and most of all at the King. The hush fell deeper as he spoke again, and named others, and banished each for some given time from Barbizen. When he had done this, he called before him Giroflanz's father.

"Messire," said he, "thou hast a son who at this present is too sorely hurt to stand before us and receive judgment ; thou art the worthy and honourable head of his house, and to thee, therefore, we address ourselves in his stead. We do not forget that he has been a man of great deeds, such as few men of his age have equalled in our time ; and we are well disposed towards him not only for our private affection to one who hath been our damoiseau and our esquire, but for the wealth of the realm which he has furthered and strengthened. But we bid thee know that he has grievously

offended us. We desire our court to be the abode of courteous men, but he has acted as no man of courtesy ought to act."

"Messire," quoth the old lord, hastily, "he had reason."

"Silence, messire," answered the King. "We have yet to learn of any reason for discourteous behaviour in our own presence. We do not wish to recite the counts thereof. We demand of thee surety that for two years he shall not return to Barbizen."

"Two years is long," said the old lord.

"See thou to it," answered the King. Then he said: "Come hither, messire, and sit beside me."

So Giroflanz's father approached, and sat beside the King; but what the King said to him was known of no man. Only when Giroflanz departed from Barbizen, Viane went also, and stayed as long as he did away from the burgh and court of the King.

Then the King cast his eyes upon Palombris, and all men turned their eyes upon him likewise: and John suddenly smiled, and straightway that smile caught and spread until all folk were smiling. The King came to halt, and knew not what to say.

"Ask him of Kol," quoth John, bending to the King's ear: and he caught that swiftly enough.

"There was a man named Kol," quoth the King, addressing Palombris. "He wedded a King's grand-daughter of Barbizen, and his issue standeth now therefore in the heritage of the realm."

Palombris bowed, and regarded not the eyes

turned upon him ; for although these things had been spoken of often enough between two or three, none had heretofore dared to speak of them openly.

“Deemest thou that his son standeth above our will ?” demanded the King.

“Nay, messire,” quoth Palombris, meekly, and thinking that if Kol’s son ever came to be King, he would count no man above his will.

“And what would Kol say of that ?” asked the King.

“Messire,” answered Palombris, “he would desire that he and his should be judged even as others are.”

The King smiled. “And would he himself have obeyed that judgment ?” he asked.

“Without doubt, messire,” answered Palombris, bowing.

“Palombris,” quoth the King, “it is our will that thou depart from Barbizen to that tower named the Garth of Joyous Days, and return not for a year and a day, saving our will bid thee. And until then, render up to Andreas the rule of the Blue Bull. And we doom thee also to take with thee Pallogris, who shall be surety to us on thy behalf.”

Then they smiled again, and all fell into good humour, and were well content with the judgments of the King, and with him also. And some knew, and told others, that she whom Kol had wedded had been born in that ancient garth of the Kings of Barbizen.

CHAPTER XVI. HOW PALOMBRIS AND PALLOGRIS WERE BOWED TO

So the King rose up, and all others rose up, and stood still. He waited until they had found Pallogris, and brought her hither ; then he waved his hand that she and Palombris should pass on before, and so followed them slowly, leaning on the arm of John.

As they began to pass through that concourse, the lords and ladies bowed to them ; and Palombris led Pallogris by the hand, and all about them were the many folk, gay as any garden of flowers, who bowed to them, and Palombris and Pallogris bowed again. In this manner they departed from the lists. And from that day forward there was a change, for men began to do and to speak as though the old days were no more, and great men lived again in Barbizen, as in the days before the coming of the heathen. From one end of that land to the other, the tellers of tales sang of the little Constable and his deeds ; and in every hall where expert men of arms gathered together, they told one another of the stroke that overthrew Giroflanz, and of the battle of the eleven. This changed many things, until people no longer thought in the same ways : no man deemed himself Palombris' equal, save those who did so for adventure and emulation ; and none, either man or woman, would have changed Pallogris, or had her in any way different from what she was. If any then had called her ugly, men would have frowned him down as a fool,

and turned their backs upon him. Palombris and Pallogris became like the towering minster, and the house of the King, something that made Barbizen mighty and magnificent, and could be shown to strange folk as a sight of that realm.

Nay, in time men came to think that a cloud would have come over the sun had Pallogris been fairer than she was : and she that had seemed ugly, became to them the greatest pleasure in the world. So in the end they deemed her a wonder, and admired her.

CHAPTER XVII. NOW, AFTER KOL AND HIS PRINCESS, PALOMBRIS AND PALLOGRIS ARE THE NEXT TO BE WEDDED IN THE MINSTER OF BARBIZEN

Now the tale tells that the King ordained a day for the wedding of Palombris and Pallogris, and bade that day be the greatest that Barbizen had seen. All men said that the great days had come again in Barbizen : they made ready to keep the wedding, and it was but a little day or two thence. And now much was otherwise than as it had been ; for those who before had looked strangely upon Pallogris now offered themselves in friendly wise, and soon brought themselves to believe that they had never been ought else than her friends. She looked upon them meekly, but said little ; and soon they brought themselves to believe also that this was as the sun and moon, which are made by God and questioned by no man ; so they shewed their

children, and bade them see her, as though Isoud were alive again for women to look upon with awe. And thus it was to the end of her life ; for about her was a garth wall of silence, into which few saw ; and they thought of no other judgment concerning her than that she was Pallogris, and therefore was thus.

So the dames and demoiselles of Barbizen arrayed Pallogris for her wedding. She thanked them, as for a small thing easily given, and easily taken, and yet graciously. They gave her gifts, and when the day came of the King's ordaining, all the ladies of Barbizen were married again in Pallogris, so mighty a day it was.

When the first day came, they met in the pleasure in the morning, and Palombris took her hands in his and said : " Tell me how it is with thee, playmate. Art thou happy ? "

She answered : " Most happy ; I could not be otherwise. But happiest in thee."

" Not so happy as I in thee," quoth Palombris.

She answered : " I do not think thou canst be as happy in me as I am in thee. What would I not give thee, playmate ? Indeed, I am all thine : I would give more, if I had more to give."

He smiled, and said : " Nothing is happier than giving unto thee. I would give thee the sun and the moon."

" Thou hast done that already," said she, smiling also, " for without thee they would go out."

Presently he said again : " Is it a trouble to be wedded ? They are so many. Art thou weary of it ? Presently we shall go to the Garth of Joyous

Days. That is a good name," said he, "and the ancient kings so named it. Perhaps they knew we should go there."

"Nay, it wearies not," she said, quietly. "It is a great dream, and marvellous. We shall wake up in the Garth of Joyous Days; but I do not grudge these."

"Then I shall have thee," he said, smiling and stroking her hand.

"I know not why thou shouldest think it so great a thing," she answered, softly.

After a while, he said: "Listen. To-morrow come great men from all the land, both old foes and old friends, and those who are neither. They will come to greet us; and I shall receive their gifts and honours. Thou shalt see me: I will be the little Constable who cast proud men into the dust; I will look mightier than a king, and the damoiseaus shall worship me. Then thou shalt look from a hidden place, and remember that I am thy playmate, and that mine arms have enfolded thee, and my hand stroked thy cheek. So thou shalt look with content on the women whose lords bow to me."

They both smiled at this, and he kissed her, and said: "I love thee, playmate. Thinkest thou that I am proud?"

"Thou art a boy still," she answered. "Be a boy ever; grow not old."

"I am always thy playmate," said he.

So it befell, that on the morrow Palombris stood on a daïs, with gold-inlaid mail upon him; and

never looked man fairer or more wonderful. Great men came to him from all the land ; men that he had cast down, and those that he had raised up, and many who had striven with him by force or craft, and found him the stronger and the craftier. He met them courteously, and received their greetings and their gifts, and they were dazzled, and well content, and thought the great days come again to Barbizen : they repeated the tales told of him, and went home to spread them afresh. This Pallogris looked upon, and saw ; and it was her playmate, and not strange. She leaned her arm upon the balustrade of the gallery, and watched that concourse : and Giroflanz grew very small, and dwindled away into nothing in her mind. She longed to be all that Palombris wished, and to give him an equal joy, and every pleasure in the world ; he would look into her eyes anon, and smile, and bend to kiss her ; and there were vine-clad walls and flowery gardens in the Garth of Joyous Days, where they would walk hand in hand. And she thought : “ Did God make this to please him or to please me ? If for him, why did they choose me ? —and if for me, I wonder why ? ”

Then after that, on a fair morning, when the sky was blue and cloudless, and the flowers bright, they arrayed Pallogris for her wedding. She let them do as they would. So began a mighty dream ; the fair day, and the sun, and the colour as folk came and went. They brought the King to see her as she stood ready ; and he said : “ A fairer bride I

never saw. I will not go too near, for I am afraid."

Then she came to the minster, which was full of folk and of clear shadow; great splendour was there, for all were arrayed as nobly as they might be. The King walked by her side; and there was Palombris, all dressed in white, and he took her hand, and put a ring upon her finger, and looked once into her eyes. Then they came into the sun again, with all the richly arrayed throng following them; and garlands and banners were in the streets, and Palombris rode beside Pallogris; and then they sat before great tables, and afterwards Pallogris sat in a little room, while they put fresh array upon her, and praised the manner of her bearing. So she came forth through a door into the light again, where Palombris stood dressed for riding. Many men stood about him, and he was speaking to John.

Then quoth the King: "Messire," said he, bowing, "behold thy dame."

Palombris took her by the hand, saying: "Messire, I thank you."

They went down steps; they rode their ways until they saw a hill clothed with woods. They came to it through rose-hung lanes still glorious with middle summer, and in the evening they saw before them a high garth wall, and the roofs of a manor house. Palombris sprang from his horse, and in a little while they stood in a cool room.

He said: "Playmate, this is the Garth of Joyous Days."

They kissed suddenly, and Pallogris said : " I have been dreaming, but now I am awake."

CHAPTER XVIII. HOW PALLOGRIS AWOKE IN THE GARTH OF JOYOUS DAYS

WHEN Pallogris opened her eyes on that morning of their first day at the Garth of Joyous Days, there was a golden mist about her ; but when she had looked a little while at the light which shone between the ancient oaken beams, she remembered that even while she slept she had been happy, and woke only to remember herself as happy as she had thought. Then Pallogris turned her head, and saw the leaded window full of light, and the casement open. There was a great garden, very old and glorious, and a wall on which a vine grew, facing the southern sun. Climbing roses looked in through the window ; and as she looked again, she saw Palombris sitting in another window, and whistling softly as the thrushes sang. She watched him as he sat, for he had a crumb of bread in his hand, and made to entice a bird towards him. He knew not that she saw him, and went on whistling softly, and sometimes a little smile flickered in his eyes.

He glanced round presently, and then came to her ; and when he had kissed her, and bidden her a good morning, he sat upon the edge of the wide bed. She turned her eyes away from his, yet in a little while looked at him again, lest he deem her ungracious. But he smiled, looking down at her, and said :

"Is it not a fair morning, playmate? And we may walk in the garden, and do whatever we list. And after to-day is to-morrow, and after that the next day: and I think there may be days after that, and we still here. Art thou content, playmate?"

"Is there not one little trouble left that we have forgotten?" said she, smiling. Her face lay amid a tangle of dark hair upon the pillow.

"He answered: "Nay, there is not even one."

She pointed a finger at him, a long white finger, saying: "I am not afraid of thee."

"Wert thou afraid of me, playmate?" he asked, with a glint in his eyes, both keen and kind.

"I never knew it," she answered, "but now I know that it was so. Thou didst carry my heart and my hope, and I trembled lest thou cast them away. But I am not afraid now. I have grown very wise while I slept, because thou lovest me. No one is so wise as we are, and I am wise because thou lovest me."

He held a flower in his hand, and with the bloom he began to stroke her forehead and cheek gently.

"Forsooth," he said, after a little while, "some things may not be undone; and if now the swordsmen came climbing up the stair, I would laugh at them, and so shouldst thou. We should go to heaven having this joy. But now," he said, "but now, many, many days of it, until it entwines thee round, and becomes part of thee, yea, even thee thyself, and hangs about thee as a fragrance."

"And thou?" she asked.

"O," he answered, gaily, "I journeyed many

days, and stood in the King's ante-chamber, and fought on the marches fiercely : because always I knew that some day there would be a day of great happiness. I could not tell when, or what it would be like. It was dim ; I did not know much about it ; but I fought for that. Nay, sometimes, lying in a cloak on hill-sides, all seemed very far away, and I could not remember thee, save a little ; but the work went on, as it were without my will. To-day it is to-day ; I knew not that it would seem so much like heaven."

Pallogris looked about, and thought that heaven could not be greatly better than this.

"Suppose," said Palombris, "that one could write a tale."

"With dragons and roses on the pages," said she.

"Yea," he answered, "and angels, and knights, and kings with crowns, and men riding on milk-white horses, with burghs seen afar off, and spires and vanes : and in the tale two lovers, and a fair tale about them."

"That would be good to write," said she.

"Yea," he said, "but suppose withal that all one wrote came true as fast as it was written ; and if I were the lover, and thou the beloved."

"Very wisely wouldst thou need to write," she answered. "I would not look until thy writing were done."

"I would write a good tale," said he. "It should be the best tale in the world."

"Thou wouldst surely do that," she said. "I

think all deeds done in a man's life are such a tale. Very marvellous art thou, my playmate, to write the tale thou hast."

"It was for thee," he said, laying his cheek on the pillow beside hers.

"Was I worth that much?" she said, softly.

"Indeed, yea: that, and more," he whispered.

"I know not how it could be," said Pallogris, smiling.

"Wouldst thou have waited two years more for me?" said he.

She answered: "Yea, truly: ten years."

"As I am to thee, so art thou to me," he said.

They put their heads close together on the pillow in a great happiness of being together. Then presently Pallogris said again:

"A woman waits, and is patient; but a man has long labour to do, that may make time pass swiftly. Tell me if that is true, playmate."

"It is true," he answered, "but I will tell thee what else is true. Waiting and hoping press heavily on a woman, but they press her love often into firmer strength. But the long labour of a man, if he be weak, or in any way ignoble, blinds the eyes of his soul, and so wraps him up that he forgets love. So it befalls, sometimes, that in his working all seems far away, and when love is gone from the memory of such a man, he forgets altogether; but he who is noble of heart forgets not amid his labour; as soon as his labour is done, it springs as fresh as before within him, like the snowdrops and crocuses of springtime, that fail never. He works like a

mole underground ; he cannot see, but presently he comes to his goal."

"And thou didst not forget," said Pallogris. "Now I understand better. Very wonderful art thou, my playmate."

Said he : "It is easy for an eagle to fly. A man is noble because he was born so : God made him."

"But it is none the less wonderful," said Pallogris. "O, I am torn with kind love for thee : thou didst labour so long to give me this joy."

"And me, also," he said.

"But this thou canst never know," said Pallogris, "which is a gift to me alone : namely, peace, and knowledge that I need dread no more."

She laid her hand upon his cheek, and caressed it.

"And I did not forget," she said. "I am glad I did not forget. O, if I had forgotten ? But I did not."

"Sweetest my playmate," said he, "those who are noble never change : and they are able to love greatly, and to be loved so : and they are wise and expert in love. It is but the feeble who change and weary. God made all things, both the eagle and the crow, the rose and the mushroom. But happiest are those who are great of heart, for their joy is greatest and most splendid. Give me thine hands, and I will hold them."

So they kissed one another yet again, and when Pallogris had arisen, they walked in the ancient garden. The sun shone upon the vine-clad wall and the flowers, and the birds sang in the trees. They

walked hand in hand, glad of all things ; and indeed, now they felt changed, as though all doubt and fear and trouble had gone, and could harm them no more, and they had become more utterly one than even love had dreamed of. So in the Garth of Joyous Days abode Palombris and Pallogris, and here leaveth off their tale without ending.

This is the ceasing of the tale of Palombris and Pallogris, who were sweet and faithful lovers ; and the finish of the book.

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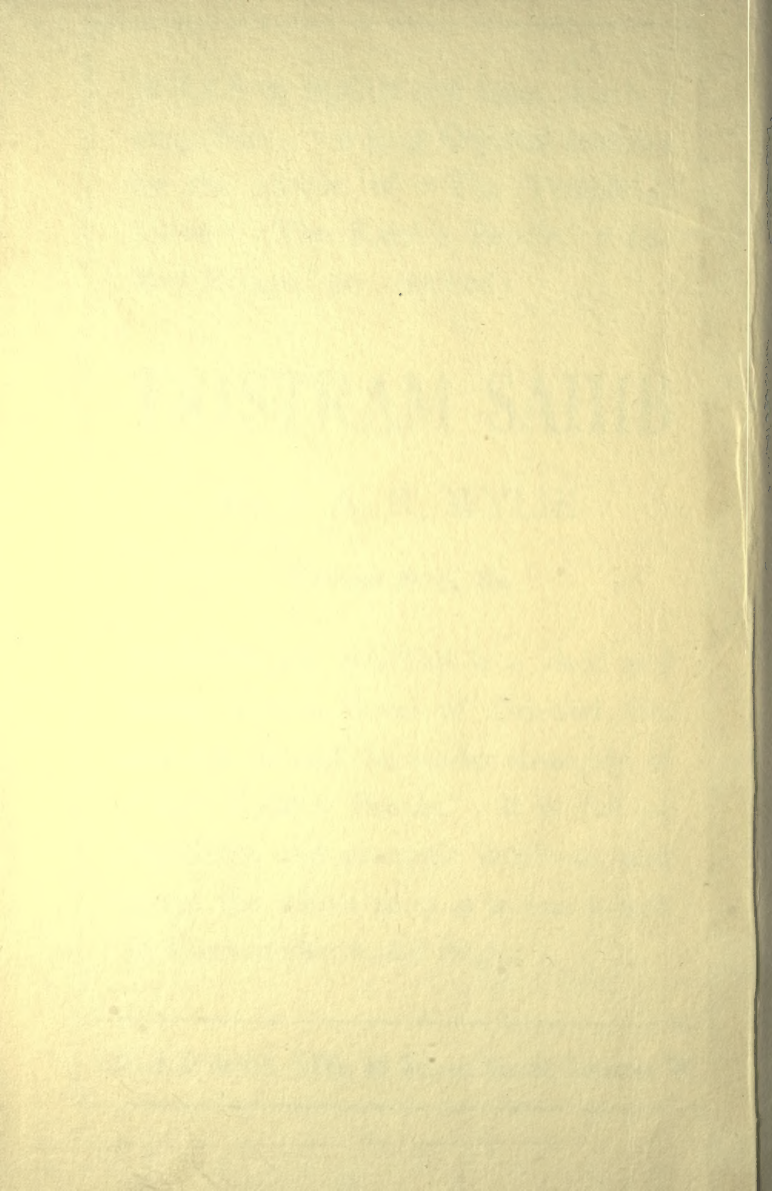
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